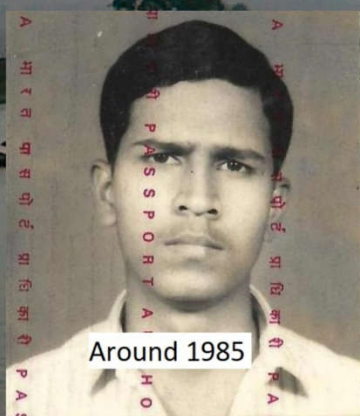


Autobiography of an Indian Software Techie and Spiritual Aspirant – Part 1

Covers Mumbai & Dombivli based life with some
foreign stints, till 2002 (age 40)



Around 1985



Around 1989



Perhaps in mid 1990s

Not-for-profit
for author; Free
reuse under
conditions

Ravi S. Iyer
Puttaparthi, AP, India

Autobiography of an Indian Software Techie and Spiritual Aspirant – Part 1

*Covers Mumbai & Dombivli based life
with some foreign stints, from childhood
to commercial retirement at age 40
(unmarried man) in 2002*

Ravi S. Iyer

Copyright: Author Ravi S. Iyer's content which forms most of this book is FREELY REUSABLE (no copyright) but under some conditions. The section titled, "Permission to freely reuse MY CONTENT of this book under some conditions", in this book gives the details.

Not-For-Profit: This book is NOT FOR PROFIT for the author Ravi S. Iyer who is also the self-publisher. But the self-publishing support provider who is not the author (e.g. self-publishing company), printer, distributor and seller may profit.

Published by: Ravi S. Iyer (Self-published) in Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, India

First published: 2019

First edition, 2nd revision, ebook

ISBN: 978-93-5382-135-7

Book availability: Free download of e-book at <http://bit.ly/2GVctBG> / <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/p/autobiography-of-indian-software-techie.html>, which will later also have links selling paperback version

Social media work of Ravi S. Iyer

* About Sri Sathya Sai Baba and more: <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com>

* Existential reality, Vedanta and God & science conversation:

<http://iamil.wordpress.com>

* Indian CS & IT Academic Reform Activism:

<http://eklavyasai.blogspot.com/p/table-of-contents.html>

* Course material related to computer programming (software lab.) courses:

<http://raviiyerteaches.wordpress.com>

* Misc. topics: <http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/>

* Misc. tech. topics: <http://ravisiyer.wordpress.com/category/misc/>

e-mail: ravi@raviiyer.org ; Facebook: <http://facebook.com/ravi.s.iyer.7>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/RaviSaiIyer>

My motto: Service to Society is Service to God

Contents

Preface	5
Permission to freely reuse MY CONTENT of this book under some conditions	10
Family Background	13
Childhood Days	24
College Days	34
Social and Cultural Milieu during Student Days	44
Software Development Career Starts Off	68
Excitement of Joining a Start-Up In a Key Position	114
The Turn to the Spiritual	136
1994 - Feb. 1999: Back to Dombivli; A balanced spiritual-cum-work life	151
Feb. 1999 - Sept. 2002: Saving Retirement Money; Preparing for ashram life	202
Epilogue	217
Appendix 1: Partial or full contents of some relevant blog posts	218
Appendix 2: List of autobiographical content posts of my blogs	299

Preface

The idea of writing this account came while I was reading a history of the Indian software field cum memoir written by a veteran of the Indian software field who was also a Professor of Computer Science in UK, Mathai Joseph, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathai_Joseph. Mathai's book is titled, Digital Republic, and info. about it is available here: <http://mathaijoseph.com/>. Here's my blog post on it titled, Book Summary: Digital Republic, India's Rise to IT Power by Mathai Joseph, <http://eklavyasai.blogspot.in/2013/06/book-summary-digital-republic-indias.html>.

As I read Mathai's book, I wrote short accounts of my story as emails to Mathai in and around July 2013, most of which he kindly read and provided some comments as well. I thank Mathai for his encouragement and for writing his book as both of these factors played a significant role in my writing of this account.

In this 2019 version, I have added significant content to the earlier 2016 version which was a slightly modified version of the first version in 2013.

The emphasis of this account is on sharing my journey through life so far and not so much on great English language or very good expression. I have tried to bring some structure and flow but have not spent too much time on it. This document is composed from a set of email conversations that I had with Mathai, with significant additional content added in this 2019 version (as mentioned above). I have put in some effort to convert the set of emails into one document but may have

slipped here & there, revealing the stitched emails history of this document. Readers will have to please bear with it.

This account is from my boyhood till I took retirement from commercial work and got on the train to come to Puttaparthi in end Sept./early Oct. 2002 (and then settle down in Puttaparthi). I was born in 1962 and so that covers roughly the first forty years of my life.

I don't know when and if I will add to these accounts in this book to capture Oct. 2002 onwards part of my life.

I am deeply grateful to my parents (Shri Vadakke Madam Suryanarayanan and Smt. Lakshme Parvati Suryanaryanan), my elder & only sister & family and my elder and only brother & family for all the love and care that we shared amongst us (and continue to share). I thank my extended family (uncles, aunts, cousins etc.) as well as my many friends over the years for their affection, love and the good times we had.

I am very grateful to many (mostly Hindu) spiritual organizations and groups in and around Mumbai, the spiritual leaders and writers in such organization and groups, the books they published on spirituality which were available in and around Mumbai for me to read, prior to my getting exposed to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and afterwards as well. They formed a vital spiritual environment for me to explore spirituality during my life in Mumbai and Dombivli. These include, but are not limited to, Ramakrishna Mission, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Divine Life Society (founded by Swami Sivananda), Swami Chinmayananda, ISKCON and Mata Amritanandamayi.

I am deeply grateful to my Guru and my Mahadev (great divine being), Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, for all the love, wisdom and care with which he indirectly and directly guided me so far in my journey and also for his tolerance of the many human flaws that I had and that I still have. Note that he took Mahasamadhi (gave up his physical body) in April 2011. The process of cleansing oneself of human flaws is not easy but I believe one should not give up trying and one day, in this life or a future one, one will win victory over one's human flaws. I offer Bhagawan my undying love and reverence from the depths of my heart.

I thank the Sathya Sai fraternity for the wonderful setup and atmosphere they have created under the guidance of Bhagavan for interested people in the ancient Sanathana Dharma (eternal ethical way of life) land of Bharath/India and across the world, to learn and practice living with the eternal (Sanathana) human values of Sathya (Truth), Dharma (Ethical life), Shanti (Peace) and Prema (Love). Note that in later years, Bhagavan added Ahimsa (Non-violence) as a vital value in addition to the earlier four values. I have some doubts about following Ahimsa as I believe in robust self-defense against those who mean harm to me and my community.

I would also like to say that as I write this sentence in April 2019, I still have many human flaws. My spiritual journey is still very much an ongoing journey with scope for a lot of improvements. However, it is possible that despite my many human flaws, my spiritual journey so far may be of interest to some readers. That is one of the motivations of publishing this book covering my life journey till I turned 40 in 2002.

I acknowledge, with awe and gratitude, the information-at-your-fingertips facility provided by Google search engine and the Internet in general. I have been able to jog, confirm accuracy of and at times correct my memory, so easily by just typing relevant queries in Google search engine and, if needed, following its top result links. I also thank Wikipedia for providing a fantastic free online encyclopedia, even if sometimes some of its information is inaccurate. I have been able to provide wiki links to many topics at appropriate points in this account for interested users to easily read up such topics.

Please note that I chose to provide the Internet URL (address) of links as text (which is hyperlinked in ebook version) as I think that may be useful for those readers who choose to read a printed version of this document. Further, many times the URL itself is meaningful. I have omitted providing short URLs (makes it easy for printed book readers to type in Internet browser program) for the long URL links due to lack of time.

Compressed pics have been used in the ebook versions to cut down size of ebook. Links of posts with larger pics are provided.

Anybody who would like to improve this book (ebook or printed book versions) by editing it to overcome above mentioned issues and other issues, and then selling the book for profit can do so, without providing any money to me. For more on it, please see the section ‘Permission to freely reuse MY CONTENT of this book under some conditions’ in this book.

Note that this version adds significant content to the two previous versions: Version (Draft) 0.1x, 23rd July 2013 and which was slightly modified for Internet release on 20th June 2016. Those versions had the title, “An Indian Software Techie’s Material and Spiritual Journey So Far” (without Part-1).

IIRC acronym is used quite frequently in this book. It stands for: If I Recall Correctly.

Permission to freely reuse MY CONTENT of this book under some conditions

1. I hereby grant permission to anybody, anywhere to freely reuse (including adaptation) any of MY CONTENT of this book, provided they give a reference to this book to enable interested persons to easily cross-check with the original source, and provided they accept the other points listed below in this Permission section including the point about lack of clarity about what constitutes MY CONTENT in pictures. An example of such reuse would be somebody editing part (or whole) of this book and then publishing and printing it as their (derived) work. Such reuse (including adaptation) of any of MY CONTENT of this book need not be limited to NOT-FOR-PROFIT work – it can be done for FOR-PROFIT work like publishing & printing a book for profit. I do NOT WANT any royalty or profit from any such FOR-PROFIT work reusing MY CONTENT of this book.

2. Any legal challenges/lawsuits filed/made by others (NOT me) related to reuse of MY CONTENT of this book, against people who did such reuse of MY CONTENT of this book, has to be handled by them (people who reused MY CONTENT) without any legal liability to me, except as required by Indian law.

3. If at all somebody is interested in translating any or all of MY CONTENT of this book to some other language then that is just another case of the reuse that I have mentioned above in point 1. So anybody is free (I grant them permission) to do

such translation of MY CONTENT of this book and publish & print it, even FOR-PROFIT for them. I do NOT WANT any of the profits they may make from this activity.

4. If at all somebody is interested in printing and selling any or all of MY CONTENT of this book without any changes, then that too is just another case of the reuse that I have mentioned above. So anybody is free (I grant them permission) to do such printing and selling of MY CONTENT of this book, even FOR-PROFIT for them. I do NOT WANT any of the profits they may make from this activity.

5. Note that this permission applies only to MY CONTENT in this book.

MY CONTENT consists of two parts - TEXT and PICTURES contents.

This permission DOES NOT APPLY to TEXT content I have used from elsewhere which I have made every attempt to clearly show as having been taken from elsewhere or from somebody else. If any TEXT content of this book is not shown as having been taken from elsewhere or from somebody else, then it can be presumed that that TEXT content is MY CONTENT.

Further note that it is not clear to me which part or whole of PICTURES in this book can be legally viewed as MY CONTENT and which cannot be viewed as MY CONTENT. So this permission may not apply to part or whole of many PICTURES in this book even if I have not indicated that those PICTURES have been taken from elsewhere or from somebody else. As an example, my work experience letters are

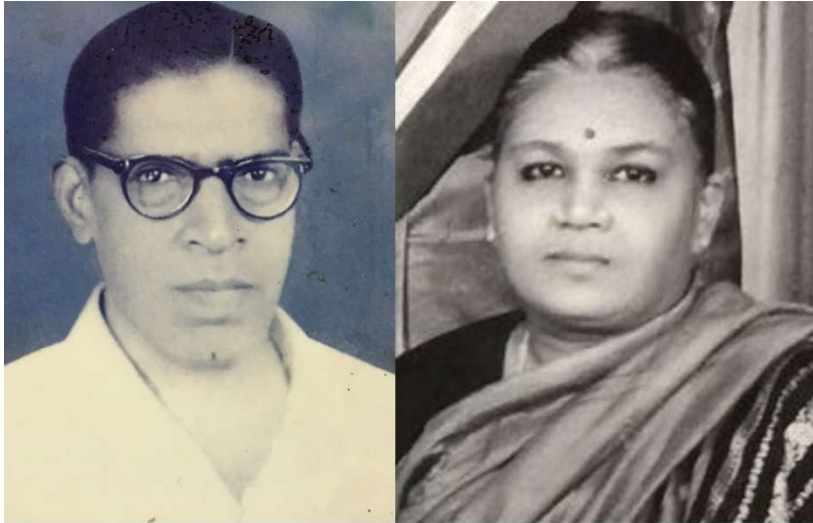
on letterhead of companies that I was employed with or provided services to as a consultant. They are MY WORK EXPERIENCE letters which I think I can legally share in this book authored and self-published by me but when it comes to granting permission for others to use it, I don't know what parts of that letter can be legally viewed as mine and what parts as NOT mine. So I am not in a position to grant permission for others to use my work experience letters.

June 2019

Ravi S. Iyer

Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, India

Family Background



Vadakke Madam Suryanarayanan (Churi) - born 1910s, died 1978, and his wife Lakshme Parvathi (Rashamma) - born 1930s, died 1999. This joint pic was made from separate pics by their children in 2018.

Above pic: My parents

Some info. about my parents from my post:

<https://ravisier.blogspot.com/2018/12/pic-and-some-info-about-my-parents-vm.html>

My father Shri Vadakke Madam Suryanarayanan, called Churi in the family, served for decades (perhaps most, if not all, of his working life) in Central Railway, mostly based in Bombay but with some stint(s) in other place(s) e.g. Jabalpur, and retired from it as an Accounts Officer around 1973. Presuming that retirement age was 60 years and that he had declared his

age correctly on joining service, he would have been born in 1913. I think we can say that he was born sometime in the 1910s. I am quite sure he was born and did his education in Kerala before coming to Bombay for a job. As the above pic states, he died in 1978.

I am quite sure my mother Smt. Lakshme Parvathi, called Rashamma in the family, was born and raised in Kerala. I think that she was born some time in the 1930s. She was a home-maker/housewife. As the above pic states, she died in 1999.

I take this opportunity to offer my deepest love and gratitude, and reverential salutations (pranams) to my parents.

Some info. about my family history from my post: My family history and how we moved from traditional South Indian Brahmin occupations to others over generations, <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2016/07/some-info-and-speculation-about-my.html>, 11th July 2016:

Our family from my father's side, I have been told, traces its history back to a widow and two young boys coming from Chola Pandya region to the Koodal Manikkam temple at Irinjnalakuda, <http://www.koodalmanikyam.com/>, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koodalmanikyam_Temple, and being given refuge there by the priest(s) of the temple. The widow was given a flower garland making job, if I recall correctly (IIRC).

My father's elder brother - eldest in the immediate family then - maintained a family tree chart but I do not know how accurate and how complete that family tree chart is. I recall my father's younger brothers and cousins, and family in general,

getting together to donate money to the above-mentioned Irinjalakuda temple and have a plaque/stone of some sort put up (along with other such plaques/stones) mentioning our family name(s) (and, in all probability, our gratitude to the temple).

The above post also provides some genealogical information about the male side of my family. Some of that info. is provided below:

Abhivadaye or Abhivadanam,
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abhivadaye>, gives (male) lineage and Veda branch among Hindu Brahmins (like me).

The Abhivadanam for my family was conveyed by an elder relative, Shri Narayanaswamy, to me when I asked him, as follows:

ABHIVADAYE AANGIRASA AMBARISHA
YUVANASVA THRAYARRISHEYA PRAVARANVITHA

HARITHA GOTHRAHA DRAAHYAYANA SUTRAHA
SAMA SAHATHYAAYEE

SURYANARAYANA SARMA NAMAHAM ASMI BOHO

Shri Narayanaswamy also wrote, "Incidentally, I am also named after my g/father Late Shri Suryanarayana Iyer - who happens to be your great grand-father."

Ravi: I thank my uncle Shri Narayanaswamy very much for providing the above info.

The Abhivadanam given above by Shri Narayanaswamy states that he and I trace our ancestry to the Rishis/Rishi-kings Angarisa ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angiras_\(sage\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angiras_(sage))), Ambarisha (possibly this, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambarisha>) and Yuvanasva, and belong to the gotra (clan) of Harita (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harita>) and (are supposed to) learn/practise/propagate the Drahyayana sutra (set of aphorisms) of the Sama Veda (See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sutra> which shows Drahyayana Sutra as one of the Sutras of Sama Veda), and his and, in this case, mine too, name is Suryanarayana. Salutations.

The traditional name given to me was Suryanarayanan and I had to use that name in Brahmin functions that I participated in, but I was called Ravi at home, and so my first name as per official (govt.) records including my school records became Ravi! However, my middle name, even officially, is Suryanarayanan as that's my father's name! My full name (official name in Indian records) is Ravi Suryanarayanan Iyer. My Late father's full name is Vadakke Madam Suryanarayanan.

Some information about Harita (my gotra) is appropriate here. From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harita>

Harita (also known as Harita, Haritsa and Haritasa) was an ancient prince of the Suryavansha dynasty, best known as the ancestor of the Kshatriya lineage, Harita gotra.

Although a Brahmin lineage, this gotra is descended from Kshatriya prince of the Suryavansha dynasty who was the

great grandson of legendary King Mandhatra. [Ravi:
*Mandhatra links to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandhatri>
where the Sanskrit name is provided as मन्धत्र. So Mandhatra
and Mandhatri are both English renderings of the same
Sanskrit word मन्धत्र.] Mandhatra was killed by Lavanasura
who was killed later by Rama's brother Shatrughna. This is one
of ancient India's most prominent and famous lineages, having
produced Rama and his 3 brothers (See Genealogy of Rama)
and Yadava lineage from Ikshvaku King Haryaswa in which
Krishna was born. Jayadratha of Mahabharata also belonged to
solar line. The first notable king of the dynasty was Ikshvaku.*

...

Brahmins of the Harita gotra trace their lineage to the
eponymous prince. While most Brahmins claim to be
descended from ancient sages, those of the Harita gotra claim
to be descended from Kshatriyas trained by the Brahmin
Angirasa and hence they have some kshatriya and some
brahmin qualities. This created, according to the Linga Purana,
"Brahmins with the qualities of Kshatriyas".[1]

This is recorded in the Hindu tradition in the Vishnu Purana:

*Ambarishasya Mandhatus tanayasya Yuvanasvah putro bhut
tasmad Harito yato ngiraso Haritah.* "The son of Ambarisha,
son of Mandhatri was Yuvanasva From him sprang Harita
from whom the Harita Angirases were descended.[1]

and in the Linga Purana:

*Harito Yuvanasvasya Harita yata atmajah ete hy Angirasah
pakshe kshattropeta dvijatayah.* "The son of Yuvanasva was

Harita of whom the Haritash were sons". "They were on the side of Angiras twice born men." "Brahmans of Kshattriya lineage."[1]

and in the Vayu Purana:

they were the sons of Haritash / Angiras, twice-born men (Brahmans), of Kshatriya race,[2] or sons of Harita raised up by Sage Angiras.[1]

Accordingly, from both Linga Purana and Vayu Purana it can be inferred that brahmins with Harita gotra belong to Ikshvaku lineage and because of the training and tapo sakti of Angirasa and blessings of Lord Adi Kesava obtained Brahmin qualities, and became twice born.

The Pravara of this gotra, used in ceremonies to reference the ancestors of the participant Brahmin has 2 variations:

Angiras, Ambarisha, Yuvanaswa, which is most commonly used

Harita, Ambarisha, Yuvanaswa.

[Wiki References

1: "The Vishnu Purana: Book IV: Chapter III". www.sacred-texts.com.

2. Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature by John Dowson

End-Wiki References]

--- end Harita wiki extracts ---

My family's Pravara is the first of the above mentioned two Pravaras.

I think it is appropriate to share some info. about Ikshvaku and his descendant Mandhatra, as Harita is the descendant (great-grandson) of Mandhatra.

From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikshvaku_dynasty

The Ikshvaku dynasty, in Puranic literature, was a dynasty[1] founded by the legendary king Ikshvaku. Ikshvaku, literally means "sugarcane"[2]. The dynasty is also known as Sūryavamśa (the Solar dynasty). Lord Rama belonged to the Ikshvaku dynasty.[3] Twenty-two out of the twenty-four Jain Tirthankara belonged to this dynasty.[4] Rishabha is present in both Hindu as well as Jain mythology. Both refers to the same person. According to the Buddhist texts, Prince Siddhartha belonged to this dynasty.

The important personalities belonging to this royal house are Mandhatri , Muchukunda , Ambarisha , Bharata Chakravartin, Bahubali, Harishchandra, Dilīpa, Sagara,[5] Raghu, Rama and Pasenadi. Although, both the Hindu Puranas and the Buddhist texts include Shuddodhana, Gautama Buddha and Rahula in their accounts of the Ikshvaku dynasty, but according to the Buddhist texts, Mahasammata, an ancestor of Ikshvaku was the founder of this dynasty,[6] who was elected by the people as the first king of the present era. According to the Puranas, supreme preceptor of the Ikshvaku dynasty was sage Vashishta.

...

In Hinduism, Ikshvaku, is the grandson of Vivasvan or Surya and son of Vaivasvata Manu. They ruled from the Kosala Kingdom, today known as Awadh in the state of Uttar Pradesh along the banks of river Sarayu with saketa, Ayodhya today as their capital. Ikshvaku is the first king who executed the Manusmrti or religious rules of Hindu living which were composed by his father Manu. Ikshvaku, ruled as Monarch at the beginning of the Kritha Yuga or First yuga, had hundred sons. His estates descended to his eldest son Vikukshi.[7]

[Wiki References:

1. Geography of Rigvedic India, M.L. Bhargava, Lucknow 1964, pp. 15-18, 46-49, 92-98, 100-/1, 136
2. Glashoff, Klaus. "Sanskrit Dictionary for Spoken Sanskrit". spokensanskrit.org. Retrieved 2017-08-18.
3. Zimmer 1952, p. 218.
4. Zimmer 1952, p. 220.
5. Ikshaku tribe The Mahabharata translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli (1883 -1896), Book 3: Vana Parva: Tirtha-yatra Parva: Section CVI, p. 228 'There was born in the family of the Ikshaku, a ruler of the earth named Sagara, endued with beauty, and strength...".
6. Malalasekera, G. P. (2007) [1937]. Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names: A-Dh. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. pp. 461–2. ISBN 978-81-208-3021-9.

7.

<http://www.gloriousindia.com/history/dynasties/ikshvaku/ikshvaku.html>

end-Wiki References]

--- end Ikshvaku_dynasty wiki extracts ---

The above Ikshvaku wiki page also provides the genealogy of Ikshvaku dynasty till Rama as provided in the Ramayana. No. 1 in the list is Ikshvaku and Mandhatri (Mandhatra, मन्धातृ) is No. 20.

Some further info. about my family history from my post: My great-grandfather Thuravoor Narayana Sasthriyal, noted Sanskrit scholar in grammar and poetry, and principal of Govt. Sanskrit College, Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) from 1909-1911, <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/my-great-grandfather-thuravoor-narayana.html>, 16th Dec. 2018, is given below (slightly edited):



In the above pic of Succession List of Principals board put up in Govt. Sanskrit College, Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), Kerala, Shri Thuravoor Narayana Sasthrigal (TNS) is shown as the 3rd principal, serving as principal from 1909 to 1911.

Thuravoor Narayana Sasthrigal's (TNS) son was Shri N Ramachandran, who was a First Class Magistrate in the District and Sessions Court in various locations in Kerala and finally, before he retired, he served in the State Secretariat in Trivandrum. N. Ramachandran was B.A., B.L. (Bachelor of Law). His Gotra was Kaundinya, Sutra was Apastamba and Shaka (branch of Veda) was Yajurveda. Note that the Gotra, Sutra and Shakha would have been/is/will be the same for TNS and also N. Ramachandran's male lineage.

N. Ramachandran's son was Late Shri R.L.Narasimhan (Narasu) who worked in Tata Mills in Bombay as Cost Accountant. N. Ramachandran's daughters are Late Smt. Lakshme Paravathi (my mother) who was married to Late Shri

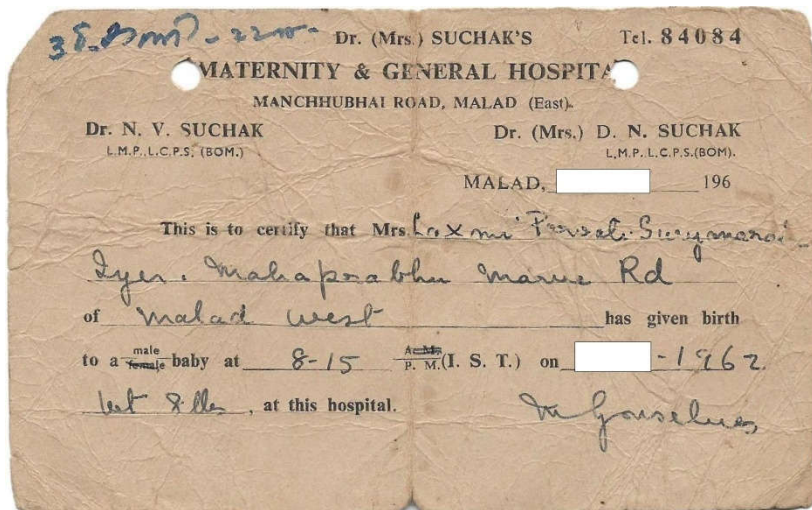
V.M. Suryanarayanan (my father), Accounts Officer, Central Railway, Bombay, and Smt. Krishnambal (only one alive among N. Ramchandran's children) who was married to Late Shri Venkatachalam who worked in a private company in Bombay.

Me, my siblings and cousins are the next generation from the above. In other words, Thuravoor Narayana Sasthrigal is our great-grandfather. *[Sasthrigal typically means Hindu priest or somebody who is well versed in traditional Hindu knowledge/scriptural knowledge.]*

Childhood Days

Most of the first four decades of my life were spent in Bombay/Mumbai and Dombivli, a town in Thane district from which one could commute by suburban train to Mumbai. I love both Bombay/Mumbai and Dombivli very dearly, despite their flaws. All of my commercial work life was with Mumbai based companies. I guess even though I now have been living in Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh for over a decade and a half, a significant part of my mental identity is that of a Bombayite/Mumbaikar and a Dombivlikar.

I was born in Malad, Bombay in 1962 [Suchak Hospital – I mention this as some months ago a Sai brother from Mumbai remarked that Sai bhajans are conducted there!].



Above pic: My birth certificate (compressed pic) as per hospital with day and month blanked out. Larger pic can be

seen here: <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/some-old-pics-of-me.html>.

Before I joined primary school, my father who was working in Central Railway, decided to take up Railway Officers' quarters between Parel and Dadar (in Mumbai). I was there till my sixth standard IIRC (If I Recall Correctly), when my father retired. I did my initial schooling years in a school called English High School, bang opposite the main entrance/exit of Dadar Railway Station (East). I think I used to come first in the class but that I think was more due to the students in the class not being very strong on the studies side than any particular brilliance on my side. I had many friends in school and in the Railway Officers colony that we lived in, and I have some fond memories of those days.

My father retired when I think I was in the sixth standard in English High School. We had severe financial problems then and no house of our own - I think my father either had some heavy immediate family and extended family financial burdens and/or perhaps had some issues/problems which consumed his earnings. I am not sure what but the net result was that it led him to borrow and become badly indebted which ate up his Railway retirement benefits. We moved as (unofficial) paying guests to various much smaller flats in clerical staff quarters, and for a short time later on towards the end of our stay there, even the lowest level staff quarters, in Government Colony, Bandra (East). I have some recollections even today of the move from the very large Railway Officers' quarters flat to the small clerical staff Govt. Colony flat being a very depressing one for me and perhaps for the whole family. However, we got used to it over time, made new friends there and adapted to

Govt. Colony clerical staff quarters' life. For the rest of the sixth standard term I had to travel by public bus from Bandra (E) to Dadar and back on my own – I would have been around 11 years old then.

I recall some of those bus experiences quite vividly even today. Conductors would usually be gracious to me noting my school bag but catching the bus from Dadar in the evening when school would get over, IIRC, exposed me to crowded bus travel and its challenges. The bus was a ring route bus – Govt. Colony, Bandra (E) to Govt. Colony, Bandra (E) [Bus nos. 314 and 315, one doing the ring clockwise and the other, anticlockwise]. So catching the bus from Dadar (E) [called Dadar T.T. as it used to be a Tram Terminus in the past] in the evening, a mid-point bus-stop, was sometimes very challenging. I am not sure about this now but, at least on occasions, I could enter the bus from the front side door usually reserved for exiting passengers (as I was a school going student). However, many times, the bus was so crowded that it would not even stop at the official bus-stop. Regulars would try to guess where it would stop before/after the official bus-stop to allow disembarking passengers to get down from the bus. The regulars would then rush towards it to try to enter the crowded bus at that time. I think I tried to pick up some tips from watching these regulars 😊.

I completed my schooling in Cardinal Gracias High School, Bandra (East), <http://cardinalgraciashighschool.com>, - 7th to 10th. The school, a Christian missionary run one, has a noble motto of “Truth Expels Darkness” which did make some impression on me. The standard of teaching in this school was significantly better than my previous school. I think I had to

make significant efforts to keep abreast of studies. I did score decently in most subjects (except drawing and physical education) and was in the top set of scorers in the class but not the topmost.

CARDINAL GRACIAS HIGH SCHOOL
BANDRA, BOMBAY 400 051.
(Recognised)

LEAVING CERTIFICATE (SECONDARY)
(Issued under Rules 14 and 30, Chapter II of the Grant-in-aid Code)

Serial No. S. 429 Register No. 1621

1. Name of the pupil in full Iyer Ravi Suryanarayana

2. Race and caste (with sub caste) Hindu

3. Place of birth Bombay

4. Date of birth, month and } -1962 ()
year according to Christian }
era (in words and figures } Nineteen Sixty-two

5. Last school attended ? English High School, Dadar.

6. Date of Admission 10-6-1974

7. Progress Good

8. Conduct Good

9. Date of Leaving the School 31st May 1978

10. Standard in which studying and since when Std. X ³/₀ (Tenth) since June-1977


11. Reason of Leaving the School Passed C.S.C. (New Scheme) Examination

12. Remarks of May-1978 at first attempt.

All Sums due to this School on his account have been paid, remitted or satisfactorily arranged for.

Certified that the above information is in accordance with the school Register.

Dated 14 AUG 1978 197

 L. Jones O.Praem.
Principal.

(No change in any entry in this Certificate shall be made except by the authority issuing infringement of this requirement is liable to involve the imposition of penalty such as that of rustication.)

Above pic: Cardinal Gracias High School leaving certificate (compressed pic) with day and month of birthdate blanked out. Larger pic and other associated pics can be seen here:

Meanwhile my father's health started going downhill. Maybe he was consumed by worry as we did not have a proper home/flat and were under significant financial stress. He had taken up a private job after retirement from Railways to augment his commuted pension income. The health problem he had was related to high blood pressure. Eventually he had a heart attack and was admitted to Nair hospital near Bombay Central railway station, where my sister was studying medicine (MBBS). I have some dim recollection of visiting him at Nair hospital and recall that doctors had tried to hide the heart attack matter from him but a fellow patient had spilled the beans to him! My father passed away around 10 days before my Xth (board) examination in May 1978. It was a devastating blow to the family and a desperate financial blow as well.

Handling the death of my father at that raw age – I was not yet 16 years old - was certainly way, way beyond me. I recall a close school friend coming and sitting with me on the day of my father's death or soon after it. We did not know what to say to each other. He would have been acutely embarrassed and I did not comprehend well what had hit me and my family, except that it certainly was not a good thing. Yes, people die – that a 15/16 year old certainly knows but knowing the impact of death of the main bread-winner of the family and the head of the family is a different matter altogether. Anyway, my close school friend meeting me that day would have helped as I still remember that condolence meeting after forty years.

It was decided by the family elders that I should not skip writing the Xth board exam. I recall that one of my uncles (father's younger brothers, Shri V.M. Vancheeswaran based in Secunderabad (Andhra Pradesh state then) and Shri V.M. Raghu based in Bombay) used to take me to the board exams center - we had moved from Bandra (East) temporarily to my uncle's (Shri V.M. Raghu's) house in Chembur where the 13 day ceremony was being performed. I was acutely embarrassed by the attention that I thought this brought from other students in the exam center. Maybe I was very strung up because I could not handle the recent death of my father and how my school friends viewed me because of that. Anyway, my uncle sensed my discomfort in other students seeing me being brought to the exam center by him. He may have felt a little bad and mentioned it to my mother who, I recall, upbraided me for it. I may have meekly kept quiet then. Youth, for most of us, has its really awkward moments/incidents.

My father's two living brothers then – Shri Vancheeswaran and Shri Raghu – helped our family to cope with the challenges. My father's elder brother Shri V.M.S. Mani had passed away earlier.

My father's death ceremony expenses would have been borne mainly by them, I am quite sure. Further, especially as Shri Raghu lived in Chembur, Bombay, he became a source of moral strength to our family. I would like to express my gratitude to Late Shri V.M.Raghu, his wife Late Smt. Vijayam and family, and Late Shri V.M.Vancheeswaran and his wife Late Smt. Savithri, and also other members of my extended family in general which includes my father's elder brother's wife – Late Periamma, and my mother's brother Late Shri R.L.

Narasimhan, his wife, my mother's younger sister Smt. Krishnambal and her husband Late Shri Venkatachalam, for their vital help and support to our immediate family in those grave times of need.

My father died when I was less than 16 years old, so I do not have as many memories of him as I have of my mother (who died when I was between 36 and 37 years old i.e. slightly over 20 years after my father's death). I recall him as a kind and rather well read man. He was quite a favourite in the extended family due to his friendliness and kindness. He was also into spirituality - he used to frequent Babas! However, I don't recall any Baba visiting home then. I do recall reading Hindu scripture at home - he would have bought/brought those books. Maybe my interest in scripture, in this lifetime, got kindled to some extent by him! But I think the spell that scripture casts on me can be explained only by some previous lives of mine which, of course, are hidden from me, as of now at least. He had a reputation for being uncorrupt even when as an Accounts Officer for Central Railway he had enough opportunities to indulge in corruption. I recall financial problems causing strain between my mother and father – I came to know that mother had to even pawn off a lot of her jewellery. I was told that father had taken loans to solve extended family problems in the past, and that it was these kind of responsibilities that led to our financial problems.

I am a late issue born when my father would have been around 45 to 48 years old. My elder and only sister is around 10 years older than me and my elder and only brother is around 8 years older than me. I believe my father married at 30 or above and my mother, as was usual in those days in our community, was

much, much younger than him - maybe in her middle to late teens - when she married him.

As mentioned earlier, my mother had a brother, Late R.L. Narasimhan and a sister, Krishanambal who lived/lives in Bombay. And then there were many other relatives too. So I had a lot of cousins to interact with on both my father's side and my mother's side, and have enjoyed the company of my cousins and their parents as well as my other relatives.

It was a large family and one felt that one belonged. So even when my father passed away when I was young and our immediate family was very unsettled, we still felt we were part of our larger family, and received their love and affection. I think that was a very big moral support for me and others in my immediate family.

My overall view of my father is that he was a good man who earned the love of his family and the community but perhaps did not get high respect from society due to his financial problems. I guess the reality of life in India during those times and even now, to a large extent, is that the man of the family earns respect from his community (extended family, neighbours etc.) only if he achieves basic financial solidity for his immediate family. If he does not achieve that, no matter how much he excels in other aspects of his character and life, he does not earn the full respect of the community. There is no escaping that reality of life, IMHO.

I am grateful to many family members, extended family members as well as family-friends (not relatives but close friends of the family) whose love and kinship have graced my

life, and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent anybody feeling bad but mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book! So I have limited the names to a few elders of the family. Note that I have made references to my relatives (uncles, aunts etc.) in a later chapter too.

I am grateful to many school friends for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any school friend who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my teachers and administrators (e.g. Principal) of both English High School, Dadar and Cardinal Gracias High School, Bandra (East) for having given me a decent school education.

In late 2018 and early 2019, I was able to send in gratitude, a paperback copy of my first self-published book (a blog book) titled, "Who am I? I am I - Ultimate Existential Reality Answer; Vedanta; God and Science conversation", <https://www.amazon.in/dp/B07K7M2963>, (e-book free download from <https://iamil.wordpress.com/consolidated-blog-content-document/>), to many of my family members including extended family members. In case of many of them, I was re-connecting with them, over phone and/or email, after a gap of around 15 years or more! It was a very happy thing for me to express my gratitude to my family and extended

family in this manner of presenting them a copy of my (first) self-published book on Vedanta and God & Science.

I was also very happy that I was able to send the same book in gratitude to administrators/family of administrators of my two schools mentioned above. For more on it, readers may visit the following posts:

1. Very happy that family of administrators of my first school (later closed) - (Jayakar's) English High School, Dadar (E), Mumbai - has received paperback copy of my book, "Who am I? I am I ...", <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2019/03/very-happy-that-family-of.html>, 4th March 2019
2. Very happy that my school - Cardinal Gracias High School, Bandra (E), Mumbai - has received paperback copy of my book, "Who am I? I am I ...", <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/10/very-happy-that-my-school-cardinal.html>, 10th Oct. 2018

In April 2019, I was also able to send, in gratitude, a copy of my above book to Suchak hospital (after checking first whether they were interested in receiving my gratitude offering). Note that I was born in 1962 in that hospital.

College Days

While I was living in Bandra (East) Govt. quarters, I joined Ruia college (Matunga), <http://www.ruiacollege.edu>, for XIth and XIIth (Junior college) in the science stream. Our financial problems continued to be severe with my elder brother being the only wage earner in the family even while he was doing his B.Com., and some small family pension coming to mother, who was a housewife and not in a position to earn anything herself. My elder sister was studying medicine and so could not contribute (significantly) to the kitty. However, I think she was already an Intern then and so was able to meet her expenses.

But, as mentioned earlier, my father's brothers did help to some extent, especially when it came to big expenses like my father's funeral expenses.

We shifted to “far-away” Dombivli to escape out of paying guest life and moved into a more stable 'deposit'/'pagri' small flat [It is not ownership but rental with a fixed low rent which the owner cannot raise and neither can the owner ask the tenant to vacate (if the rent is paid). A significant ‘deposit’ amount has to be paid upfront to the owner]. The building was a Ground + 2 floors one, called Ganga Nivas and was on Ayre Road in Dombivli (East). In later years, the building was vacated by all residents as it was in danger of collapsing, which it later did, if I recall correctly!

The move to Dombivli brought in suburban train travel experience to me, most of the time in very, very crowded 2nd class compartments (during my college days). The commute

time from Dombivli to Matunga where Ruia college was located was significant – around an hour each way. But many times, the suburban train experience was enjoyable too, especially when the train was not so crowded and speeding down the open and picturesque Thane – Dombivli stretch. Bhajan singing groups, Hindi film song singing groups/individuals, card playing groups, informal discussion/debates especially while reading the newspaper, camaraderie between regular travelers etc. made regular suburban train travel quite interesting at times.

Junior college at Ruia was quite mind-broadening for me. I came across chaps who were more knowledgeable, more polished and scored significantly better than me in the exams. I did badly (did not get selected) in the IIT (Indian Institute of Technology, famous set of top engineering institutions in India) entrance test even though I had joined Agarwal (or was it spelled Agrawal?) preparatory classes [a famous IIT entrance prep class in Bombay then – around 1980]. I don't mean to make excuses but I honestly think that commuting over a long distance, small flat in which we lived etc. all contributed to me finding it difficult to get in-depth into IIT entrance exam preparation.

The rest of the engineering college options were decided by XIIth standard board exam results. IIRC, there was only one engineering institution in Bombay then, a premier institution called VJTI,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veermata_Jijabai_Technological_Institute, which accepted day students for engineering degree program. My XIIth standard board exam results were not good enough for me to make it to VJTI.

But they were good enough for me to get a decent shot at some engineering options in state level counseling (admission counseling) conducted for various engineering colleges (govt. funded, if I recall correctly) across the country. However, money for hostel living & engineering tuition fees was a challenge. Mother said that we will manage somehow but elder brother took me aside and gave me the realistic picture before I went to engineering seat counseling alone at Nagpur. I thank him for giving the real picture. Far better to have known the financial realities then itself than discover them later mid-way through engineering studies.

I did not get my choice (IIRC) of electrical or electronics engineering in the first round of counseling at Nagpur. I turned down other options like civil engineering not realizing that I could have easily got electrical or electronics in the second round. Perhaps I was looking for an excuse to not take engineering as I had been given the real financial picture at home. I was chided about my decision on the way back from Nagpur by a co-traveler student who also had come to the counseling, who informed me about the second-round possibilities. Anyway, I think it was good that I did not get into any engineering college outside Bombay as my family was simply not in a position to support me through four years of hostel living & engineering tuition fees.

So I continued with Ruia college to do my 3 yr B.Sc. (Physics) - 1980 to 1983. During my days at Ruia, for B.Sc. we first had to overcome our disappointment on not doing engineering or medicine. Almost all, if not all, the guys who could, did. Typically it was guys who could not get into these coveted streams who continued with B.Sc. I think the teachers also felt

that disappointment. In hindsight, I feel the teachers were quite decent for B.Sc. but I was not inspired by B.Sc. studies so much. I mean, the problem of not being inspired by B.Sc. studies was due to me and not due to B.Sc. teachers of Ruia college. Some topics were fascinating but nothing that made me feel that this is what I should do for the rest of my life. And frankly, I was more interested in finishing studies quickly and then earning badly needed money by taking up a job.

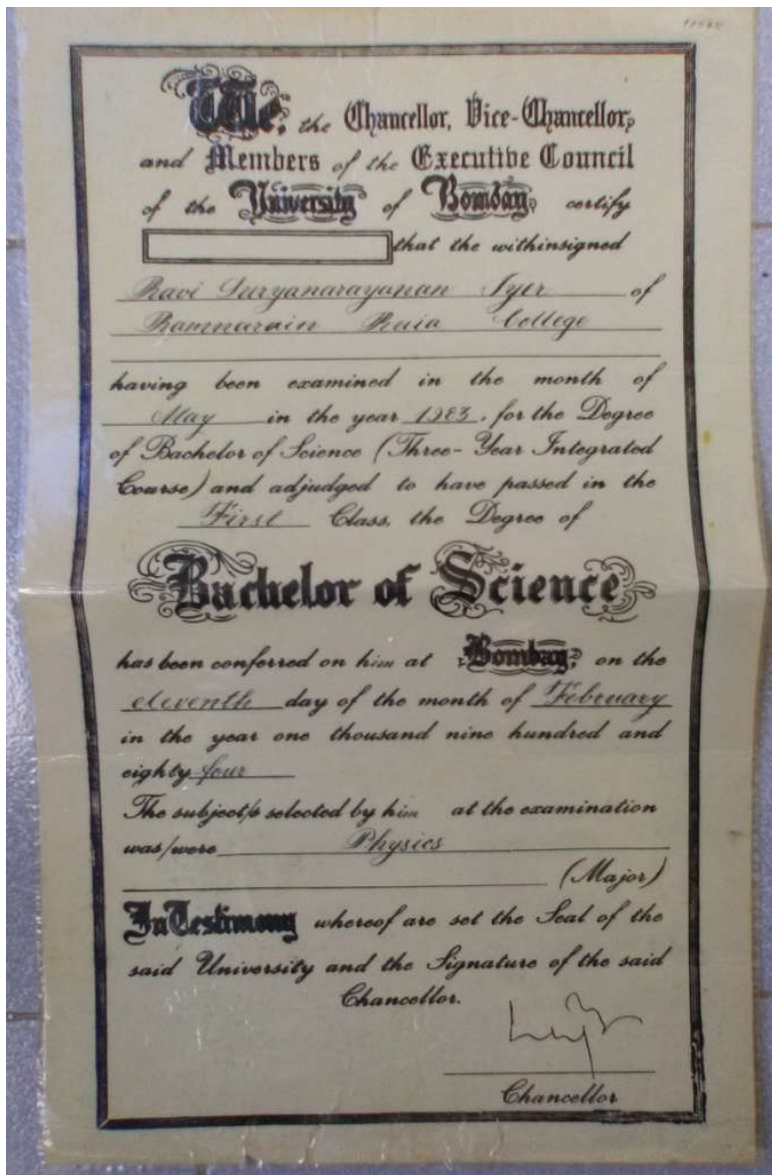
I recall a lot of cricket that I used to see on the cricket grounds opposite Ruia & Podar college then! But I must say that some teachers were exceptional. Our Physics HOD, a Dr. Patel, was very enthusiastic and his enthusiasm rubbed on to students. I still recall the class where he inspiringly talked about Quantum physics revolutionizing the earlier Newtonian/Classical Physics world.

I must also say that Ruia library was pretty good. I recall reading a German author's book on light/spectra which was so logical and so sensible, that I got really enamoured of the book. It showed Physics in a very attractive logical light to me as compared to the prescribed textbooks that I had to study to pass the exams, which, in parts, seemed somewhat dense and confusing to me.

As I was going through the three years of B.Sc., it started dawning on me that science seemed tougher than what I heard friends were doing in engineering. However, it seems to me that many B.Sc. students managed to squeeze through the exams without getting deep into science. Perhaps the evaluation rigour of the science stream was lower than the engineering stream as science stream mostly got the leftover

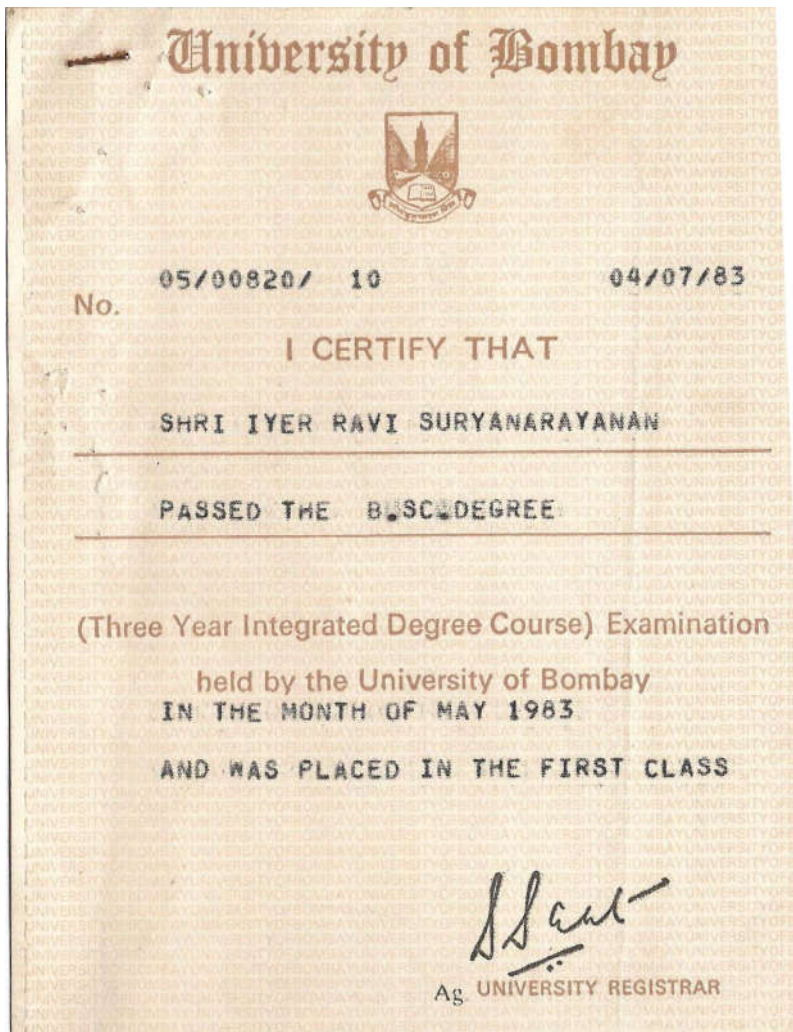
students. Sure, there would be some exceptions that chose to do pure science instead of engineering despite having qualified for engineering seats (and having no money problems), but I can't recall any such student in Ruia. Physics, which was my major, had all the intellectual challenge that I could ever want. But I wanted a job which will earn me money and achieve financial self-reliance for myself and my family. So I saw my future graduate degree as a passport to that job and not really a pathway into mastery of some intricately complex topic (intellectually) like theory of general relativity.

Somewhere down the line perhaps while I was studying B.Sc., my sister got married. My father's brothers, Shri V.M. Vancheeswaran (Vanchi chitappa) and Shri V.M. Raghu (Raghu chitappa) (Shri V.M.S Mani had passed away) took up the financial and organizational responsibility for the marriage being conducted in keeping with the standing of the extended family. Vanchi chitappa played the role of my sister's father in the ceremony of giving the bride to the bridegroom. As I was somewhat young I was not privy to the financial details but I am quite sure our immediate family including me, of course, owes a great debt of gratitude to my father's brothers, Vanchi chitappa and Raghu chitappa, for having taken up and executed the financial and family responsibility of my elder sister's marriage very well.



Above pic: Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) with Physics Major degree certificate (compressed pic) issued by Bombay University, <http://mu.ac.in/portal/>. Note that Ruia college (and Autobiography of an Indian Software Techie ... Page 39

Khalsa college) then was affiliated with Bombay University. I passed with a First Class. The degree was conferred in February 1984 but the exam was held in May 1983 as can be seen from passing certificate (compressed) pic below.



Larger versions of above pics and other associated pics can be seen here:

https://ravisier.blogspot.com/2018/12/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics_28.html.

I started my M.Sc. Physics in 1983 at Khalsa college in Matunga again, <http://www.gnkhalsa.edu.in/>. The specialization I chose was Electronics as that was supposed to be having good job potential. A Prof. Mohinder Singh (IIRC) was the main person handling the Khalsa college lab. Prof. Mohinder Singh and the Khalsa lab. were supposed to be very good in the Electronics area according to the grapevine and so I chose Khalsa. I recall how particular about details Prof. Mohinder Singh was in the Lab. – we had to be careful as we were doing our experiments under his watchful eye. The lab. was his dear baby and we had to handle everything in it with due care and dignity! The lectures were at the Kalina campus of Bombay University.

The family was keen on my doing M.Sc. properly – without trying to earn money. Further my sister and her husband contributed to my family's expenses to some extent – I don't know the details. I am grateful to both my sister and her husband for the help they rendered to me then. During B.Sc. time I had decent pocket money to indulge in quite some extracurricular activities. My late elder brother Vishwanath (Rajamani) had to shoulder most of our family burden then including supporting me during my college days. I am very grateful to Rajamani for this great help he rendered to me then.

Deep down I felt that, given the family's financial position, it is not right for me to expect support from brother or sister

beyond graduation. So I decided that I should try to do further studies on my own steam. I started off the M.Sc. degree studies with family support but had a grand plan of earning money via giving tuitions to school students and others thereby managing to do rest of M.Sc. on my own steam. The grand plan did not work out! I learned some lessons about marketing in the tuition business and the severe constraints I had of having a long commute from Dombivli to Bombay for doing such business and studying M.Sc. at the same time. Somewhere down the line in the first year of M.Sc. itself, I took the decision of dropping out and trying for a job in software development/programming. I think that was one of the most courageous decisions and one of the best decisions of my life.

I am grateful to my many college friends for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any college friend who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my teachers and administrators (e.g. Principal) of Ruia college as well as Khalsa college (short stint in Khalsa) for having given me a good college education.

Like in the case of my schools, I was happy to be able to send in gratitude, paperback copies of my Who am I? I am I ... book to Ruia college (and Shikshan Prasarak Mandal, Pune, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shikshan_Prasarak_Mandali

which runs Ruia college), and Bombay University. For more, please visit the following:

1. Feeling very happy that my Alma Mater, Ruia college, Mumbai, has agreed to receive my book, "Who am I? I am I - Ultimate Existential Reality Answer; Vedanta; God and Science conversation",
<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/09/feeling-very-happy-that-my-alma-mater.html>, 21st Sept. 2018
2. Glad to know that Mumbai University Vice-Chancellor's office has received paperback copy of my book, "Who am I? I am I ...",
<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/10/glad-to-know-that-mumbai-university.html>, 8th Oct. 2018

Social and Cultural Milieu during Student Days

My Bombay experience of my student days is that of tons of family friends and relatives in Bombay proper (Dadar, Matunga, Bandra (E), Chembur, Mulund) as well as in Dombivli. Almost all of my extended family from both my father's side (from Irinjalakuda, Kerala) and my mother's side (Trivandrum, Kerala) had moved to Bombay, in all probability attracted by the good material life of Bombay as compared to their lives in Kerala. So I had and still have tons of relatives in Bombay most of whom are quite well-to-do now. The Dadar Railway officers colony experience exposed me to upper middle class families from all over India and Bandra (East) Govt. staff (clerical) colony experience as well as Dombivli experience exposed me to lower middle class Maharashtrian and other language families from various parts of Maharashtra including Muslim dominated parts, and India. So I was part and parcel of the social and cultural milieu of middle-class Bombay.

Book Reading

I loved reading. Perhaps the world that books took me to was a welcome escape from some of the tough financial and finance-related realities that the family faced. However I must also say that as a family we were very close-knit and so emotionally we were quite well-balanced and helped each other out. So the family was quite a happy family despite the tough financial challenges and the disturbance & instability of having to live in Paying Guest type of accommodation and having to change

that very often (typically around every year). It was not legal to live as Paying Guests in Govt. Colony quarters of govt. staff. There was always a threat of being evicted by govt. inspectors and action also being taken on the govt. servant who illegally rented out his/her flat. Brokers would 'manage' these threats and we never directly faced such eviction. But the threat was there in the background and that certainly did not provide a stable environment for living or growing up.

An interesting human factor was how we came to know many good families and people in Govt. Colony. I think the many difficulties in life which lower middle class families face make them more humble and willing to receive help as well as to render help. Our move to Dombivli was made after a Maharashtrian neighbour's relative who was from Dombivli suggested it. Three families – the Maharshtrian family, ours and a Malayali family neighbor - Shri U. Preman and family - all moved to Dombivli. Our family and Shri U. Preman and family continued to be neighbours in Dombivli, and our families became very close.

Anyway, I became a voracious reader. I was a very enthusiastic member of free libraries and managed to somehow get books at cheap rates/free from paid lending libraries too. My uncles (father's brothers) were avid readers too – I got a lot of books from raiding their bookshelves and boxes packed with books with some of these boxes usually kept in the attic/loft. I think far more of my education/learning has come from these outside-curriculum books that I read than the inside-curriculum books of school and college. During college study days, the authors/books I liked/read were George Bernard Shaw, some of Shakespeare's works, of course,

Tolstoy, Gandhi (My experiments with Truth), lots of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan type books on Hindu mythology/scripture, Nehru (Discovery of India), Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead (did not like this 'cult' book but it was a must read as some friends were very impressed by it), Tagore (Gitanjali), R.K. Narayan (I loved his books), George Orwell, Somerset Maugham, Ralph Emerson, Thoreau, Bertrand Russel, James T. Adams (The Epic of America) ... P.G. Wodehouse, Alistair Maclean, Agatha Christie, James Hadley Chase, Frederick Forsyth (The Day of the Jackal), Mario Puzo (The Godfather), Nick Carter (hidden reading), Arthur Hailey, John Le Carre (The Spy who came in from the cold, and others too), Issac Asimov (Foundation Trilogy), Arthur C. Clarke ... Premchand (Hindi). [My elder brother used to be quite a voracious reader too during those days. I got to know of and perhaps borrow many books through him.] During school days I recall reading Enid Blyton, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes) and similar authors, Amar Chitra Katha illustrated stories ('comics') about Indian scriptural and historical figures, Chandamama magazine (lots of Indian moral stories) and perhaps some of Agatha Christie and Alistair Maclean's books.

I did like fair bit of English poetry but not to the extent of reading significant amount of poetry beyond the syllabus of school and college. Tennyson (The charge of the Light Brigade), Wordsworth (I wandered lonely as a cloud), Tagore (Gitanjali) and Robert Frost (Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening) are some of the poets I can easily recall. The poem Leisure by W.H.Davies ("What is this life if, full of care; We have no time to stand and stare.") made a very deep impression

on me ☺! I think such poems added to the deep questions I had about wholly materialistic life being suitable for me, which my interests in Vedanta had raised right from a very young age.

I studied Hindi and Marathi poetry and prose as second (and third) languages in school. I don't think I studied those subjects with the attention they needed and so my recollection of poetry and prose in those languages that I studied in school is rather dim.

I was drawn to books on spirituality and religion in particular. Upanishads (Vedanta) & Bhagavad Gita were the top-notch 'philosophical' authorities on life for me even at that time ☺. Abridged accounts of Ramayana, Mahabharatha and Bhagavatha Purana were fascinating reads but I did have fair bit of doubt about whether they were myth or factual accounts (or a mix). As I got into science in college, I think it was considered unsophisticated and naïve to believe that Ramayana, Mahabharatha and Bhagavatha Purana were anywhere close to factual accounts and I came under that pernicious (subtly harmful) influence.

But I do not recall any specific official activities in Ruia which professed the view of above scripture being fictional or largely fictional. Note that Ruia college is bang in the middle of Hindu Colony, which in those days seemed to me to be quite dominated by Hindus, at least some of whom would have had reverence for Rama and Krishna and other Hindu Avatars.

I think skepticism in Puranas and Ramayana accounts was the quietly expressed view especially among the smarter, 'progressive' and active chaps of the student community.

Challenging the views of such student ‘thought-and-action-leaders’ and doing something that would openly attract their disdain was almost impossible to even contemplate for a shy fellow like me. I must also say that some students were religious and wore marks of their faith on their body – a holy thread on the wrist, a bracelet with an Om symbol and some even would have a tikka of chandan or kumkum on occasion. So Ruia was a very comfortable place for a devout Hindu to study in. However I do not recall any Veda Yagnam or other elaborate Hindu rituals, or a Tukaram Abhang session or an exposition on Sant Gnyaneshwar’s Dnyaneshwari both of which are famous in Maharashtrian Hindu traditions, taking place in Ruia when I was attending college as a student. Of course, neither do I recall any similar events related to other religions like Christianity, Islam, Sikhism or Buddhism. Perhaps the college management wanted to play safe by taking a strictly ‘secular’ approach.

IIRC, the philosophical part of Hinduism as exemplified by Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita were viewed very positively and such interest was quietly appreciated – Ruia had a strong Hindu and Maharashtrian culture influence. I think I did fair bit of reading on Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Buddha and Jesus Christ. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan books formed an important part of my exposure to Bharaitya & Hindu culture – my uncles used to have these books and so it was easy for me to get to read them.

Hindu Brahmin rituals

Our extended family was quite particular about following the tradition Tamil Brahmin rituals. We actually were Tamilans

who had settled in Kerala for generations and so spoke Tamil with a lot of Malayalam words added to it (I think such Tamil is referred to as Palaghat Tamil). By the time I grew up almost all of our family from both parents' side had migrated from Kerala to other parts of the country with many settling in Bombay.

Marriages of extended family members were elaborate affairs with attendance being almost mandatory if it was held in Bombay and which was the case for most of these marriages. The thread ceremony (Upanayanam) of boys being ushered into the regular rituals (Sandhyavandanam) of Brahminhood was another elaborate and rather important event. As a youngster, these ceremonies were a great opportunity for me to interact with others in the extended family though it would sometimes seem to be a little boring too. However, elders would involve youngsters into some activities like serving food or taking care of guests and so it was something that I looked forward to.

The annual ceremony for departed parents (of my parents) was an important event where the family would gather in the house of the eldest member of the family (my father had an elder brother who used to live in Matunga and he was the head of the family – Shri V.M.S. Mani).

There would also be some Poojas at home where the Brahmin priests would come and conduct the ritual. [These are besides the regular prayer routine that family members, especially mother, would have every day in front of the home altar with photographs of various gods and goddesses, and some idols too.]

Some of the typical chants of the Brahmin priests (e.g. Indraya svaha, Agnaye svaha, Varunaya svaha) while they were offering oblations into the sacred fire (created temporarily with some bricks and cowdung on the floor of the apartment flat by the priests) became a part of me quite unconsciously. I had seen the fire oblation, heard the chants and later uttered the chants myself, so many times right from early childhood that I did not need to make any effort to make it a part of me. In later years when I tended to view these rituals with some doubt and had even distanced myself from it for some time, they continued to be part of me as a cultural aspect that I simply could not detach from my personality. When I finally turned back to watching & listening to Vedic ritual with a born-again kind of zest, all my prior exposure was able to almost immediately come back to the forefront of my mind.

Movies and Songs

An important aspect is the impact of Hindi film songs and Hindi films, along with some English and Marathi films and/or songs, on my life during school and college days. I think Kishore Kumar, Mohammed Rafi & Lata Mangeshkar's voices along with the lyrics of composers whose names I usually would not note and the music of music directors whose names I sometimes knew, were a key component of my life during college days, and many of those songs are still fresh in my mind. Over the past few years, I have put up Facebook and blog posts on some of these songs as I enjoyed them on youtube.

I think the Hindi film industry - actors, scriptwriters, film directors, singers, music directors etc. were (and perhaps still

are) a vital part of most youth life lived in Bombay (and many parts of the country & beyond too). The actor stars that I recall from those days were Rajesh Khanna, Sharmila Tagore, Amitabh Bachhan, Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Jaya Bahaduri, Dharmendra, Hema Malini, Amol Palekar etc. The Hindi films that I can easily recall from those days are Anand, Aaradhana, Deewar, Zanjeer, Amar Akbar Anthony, Sholay, Namak Haraam, Hare Rama Hare Krishna, Masoom, Chasme Buddoor, Gol Maal, Ankhiyon ke Jharokhon Se ... Oh Lord! How powerful is the impact of these films, film stars and songs - they are almost evergreen in my memory! Far more lasting than the Physics I learned, most of which I have forgotten!

Today I think I understand far better, the vital role the Hindi film industry and film songs played in my upbringing. The lyrical/poetical and even prose (dialogue) aspects of the better kind of Hindi movies appealed very much to me as I could identify with them far more easily than the English books that I would read. After all the Hindi movies and songs dealt with the Indian social and cultural milieu of which I was a part, whereas most of the English books I read dealt with an alien European/North American social and cultural milieu! The emotional aspects of life seem to be far more important to Indians than Westerners. Hindi movies and songs tapped into that emotional vein in a wonderful and moving way. Vividh Bharati (radio station) programs and Binaca Geet Mala on Radio Ceylon were my favourites and many of the songs I heard then have stayed with me to this day both for their music and their lyrics. Many of the hit songs dealt with philosophical and spiritual matters of life – these were extremely dear to me. I am resisting the temptation to put down the many, many

Hindi film songs that I love as it may expand this account into a very long one 😊.

Mohammed Rafi Sahab died while I was in college. There was an open air music program to honour his memory, which IIRC was called “Ek Shaam Rafi ke Naam”. It was the first open air large-scale music program that I attended. The main singer sang evergreen hits of Rafi in a voice pretty close to Rafi’s and the music was quite good. The songs & music which were loud enough to immerse listeners in it, and the knowledge that the great Mohammed Rafi is no more, combined to create deep feelings of joy as well as sadness.

I think Hindi films and its songs let me more deeply experience and celebrate my being Bharaitya/Indian in a way which Western English language forms of creativity – poems, prose, songs, movies etc. could not. [Indian English creativity was not that significant in the 80s.] As an example, the onset of rains is a wonderful, life-bursting and blossoming event in India which was frequently expressed quite beautifully in Hindi films and its songs [One example: Saavan ka Mahina, Pavan kare Soor ...]. But I don’t recall any (Western) English poem or prose that I studied/read in those days celebrating rain. Instead rain was usually a very glum event in that literature. Later, when I experienced rain in Europe especially during cold weather, I could very well understand why European writers were glum about rain.

I loved Hindi as a language but was not able to really indulge in that love beyond Hindi films and songs. My Hindi reading was not good enough to handle famous Hindi books of that time. So I preferred to read English books. One thing that I had

a weakness for was Hindi Shayaari and Ghazal to some extent. Even if my Hindi was not great, I loved to listen to Shayaari when I got the opportunity.

Marathi was quite tough for me in school and so I think I did not really know much about it then. After moving to Dombivli while in B.Sc., I started getting better exposure to Marathi – Maharashtrians formed the overwhelming majority of Dombivli residents then. Dombivli also had many cultured Maharashtrians with quite a few Marathi cultural activities which my Dombivli Maharashtrian friends talked about. I enjoyed some Marathi songs including some famous devotional ones but it was quite limited exposure at that time. I think I tried to read a famous contemporary Maharashtrian author, Pu La Deshpande, who was praised as a P.G. Wodehouse type humorous writer by my Maharashtrian friends but my Marathi was too weak to handle such reading.

One feature of my increased interaction with Maharashtrians in Dombivli was a better understanding of how the great Maratha warrior, Shivaji Maharaj, protected Hindu religion and culture from persecution and destruction by some of the Mughal rulers. Note that some Mughal princes and rulers seem to have respected Hindu religion and culture. Perhaps foremost among them is Dara Shikoh,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dara_Shukoh, who was Aurangzeb's elder brother and heir apparent (and eldest son) of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, but lost out to Aurangzeb in the battle for succession, and was killed by Aurangzeb. Readers may want to visit my post: The champion of Unity of Being (Unity in Sufism & Vedanta): 17th century Mughal Prince

Dara Shikoh, <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2015/09/the-champion-of-unity-of-being-unity-in.html>, 14th Sept. 2015

Of course, as I did my schooling in Bombay under Maharashtra board, the history syllabus had a lot of coverage of Shivaji. But I did not realize then how vital a role he had played. In Dombivli, many of the Maharashtrians, I and family interacted with knew this history quite well and their view seemed to be supported by evidence like the forts that Shivaji had built across the Maratha kingdom then and Marathi literature that had recorded the events of that period. The great Mughal emperor Akbar had created a multi-faith environment during his reign but Aurangzeb, it seems to me, wanted to destroy that multi-faith approach. Shivaji played a vital role in partially blocking Aurangzeb's plan.

I saw a fair bit of English movies too mostly in posh theatres in South Bombay – Regal, Sterling, New Excelsior etc. Some of the English movies that I recall seeing during those days are: Where Eagles Dare, Mackenna's Gold, Tora Tora Tora (Pearl Harbour attack), Enter the Dragon (Bruce Lee), The Towering Inferno, Sound of Music, Great Escape, Modern Times (Charlie Chaplin) and Gandhi. I think I had also joined the film club in Ruia and had seen some foreign and Indian art films but I don't have a clear recollection about it now.

Sports

Cricket, of course, was another big, big part of my Bombay school and college life. There was a fair bit of playing tennis ball local ground/gully cricket and lots of watching cricket on TV and hearing commentary. Govt. Colony in Bandra (E) had

the benefit of large grounds where large number of youngsters would gather to play tennis ball cricket (season (leather) ball cricket was rare). I became a regular with one team which had many of my Cardinal Gracias school mates. I looked forward very much to the evenings when we would play cricket.

Vacation periods allowed us to play for longer and participate in cricket matches against other teams. As dusk would fall we would wind up the game and sit down together on the ground for some chit-chat. I learned a lot of stuff about life from such chit-chat sessions ☺. I was not bad as a batsman and did have some successes in matches that would be played against other teams but when I tried getting into bigger teams with more grown up people, my weaknesses as a batsman were brutally exposed ☺.

Discussing national and international cricket as seen on TV and media was a big thing - enjoying victories, sorrowing over defeats, predicting, hoping, sometimes hoping against hope for victories, centuries, wickets etc. While in school itself, Sunil Gavaskar and the spin quartet of Chandra, Bedi, Prasanna & Venkat along with Solkar's catching had become legendary due to the 1971 victories over England and the West Indies. I am not very sure about this but I have a dim recollection of a friend in my Dadar school (where I was studying then) taking me to the building where Sunil Gavaskar's uncle, Madhav Mantri, stayed in Hindu Colony, Dadar. I think we got very lucky and even had a small interaction with Sunil Gavaskar there (outside the building). But it is very hazy and so I could be wrong about the small interaction with Sunil Gavaskar. Was he a hero then or what! Double century against the mighty West Indies and playing a vital role in India's first away

victories in West Indies and England – just unbelievable stuff! Elegant Gundappa Vishwanath was a treat to watch and there would be many, many debates in my cricket friends (and relatives) circle about who is better, Gavaskar or Vishwanath!

I was taken to see a day's play of the final test match between West Indies and India at the Wankhade in 1975 when I would have been around 13 years old. I somewhat vaguely recall that I was thrilled to the depth of my being ☺. The beautiful green ground, brown wicket, cricketers in bright white clothes and the distinctive red ball was quite a different sight from what I had seen on TV. In the stadium I felt that I was almost a part of the game. We were on the mid-wicket fence area stand. I recall Karsan Ghavri sending Roy Fredericks' stump almost cart-wheeling – the whole stadium seemed to be spontaneously up on its feet thrilled with the sight and cheering the Indian team on. But Clive Lloyd's 242 not out in the first innings itself had hammered India into submission and India lost the decider test match and series. [Scorecard:

<http://www.espnricinfo.com/ci/engine/match/63135.html>,

Series account:

http://static.espnricinfo.com/db/ARCHIVE/1970S/1974-75/WI_IN_IND/WI_IN_IND_1974-5_SUMMARY.html]

What an awesome fast-bowling pack, the West Indies would have in later years – Andy Roberts, Michael Holding, Joel Garner, Colin Croft and Malcom Marshall! Andy Roberts was part of the 74-75 series team and had become quite famous in India - the film Amar Akbar Anthony had an Amitabh Bacchan quip referring him. The bowling action of Michael Holding seemed to be a combination of poetic beauty and tremendous power. The cricketing world seemed to

collectively quake in front of the West Indies fast bowlers. To top this fast bowling menacing power, they had accomplished batsmen like Lloyd, (King) Richards, Fredericks, Greenidge, Kallicharan etc. ... the Windies seemed invincible kings but would sometimes inexplicably crumble to pieces and lose. Australia's Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson had also acquired an awesome reputation as fast bowlers.

The 1983 world cup victory of Kapil Dev and team came as a tremendous surprise to me. Maybe I was not following cricket that closely in my B.Sc. years and so had not realized that the team was pretty good. I think after the 1971 victory over England and West Indies, this was the next really big victory for Indian cricket.

Interestingly, while in Ruia I came to know of batting exploits of two chaps of the Ruia cricket team – Chandrakant Pandit and Lalchand Rajput – both of whom were doing their graduation (in the Arts stream IIRC) around the time I was doing my graduation in Ruia. While I did not know them, I saw them quite a few times on and off the ground (opposite to Ruia and Podar colleges – Ruia had the science and arts streams whereas Podar catered to the commerce stream). Both Pandit and Rajput went on to play for Bombay/Mumbai and India. Rajput got better known after he became manager of the Indian team, IIRC. We also heard of the exploits of a couple of famous former students of Ruia's adjacent and sister institution Podar – Dilip Vengsarkar and Ravi Shastri. Vengsarkar was already playing for the Indian team before I joined Ruia. I was told about how Vengsarkar used to play tennis ball 'gully' cricket in Hindu colony where Ruia & Podar were located and

where he grew up. Shastri debuted for India while I was in Ruia.

I was into Chess quite a bit and had acquired a small reputation – even represented my school once in some tournament where I don't think I fared well against bigger league chess players ☹️ 😊. Table tennis was something that I had got into and was rather decent in, during the senior school days. I was not into drama or elocution. I think I was quite painfully shy of coming onto stage and preferred to be with the crowd. Maybe the financial challenges that the family faced had a sub-conscious impact on me which had lowered my self-esteem. I loved being a back-bencher in class instead of sitting in the front.

Social Service

During B.Sc. years (after junior college) I became rather deeply involved with National Service Scheme (NSS), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Service_Scheme, at Ruia. I loved helping people – this activity enabled me to explore that aspect of my personality under the control and guidance of college faculty and within an organizational framework. I participated in anti-TB drives where we had to visit poor localities in nearby areas like Parel and fill out survey forms as well as provide advice/information on avoidance, early detection and treatment of TB.

We volunteered at physically handicapped school events. I recall a three-legged race event where I was a volunteer. Two deaf-and-dumb children had some problems with the piece of cloth that tied their legs together and turned to me for help. I tried to tie it properly but may not have done a good job – I

was somewhat poor in these physical tasks. One of the children then expressed, far more powerfully than words can, his (or was it her?) opinion about me by putting a finger to the side of his (her) head and twisting it ☺! I was acutely embarrassed and wondered whether others had noticed this powerful statement about their view of my mental capabilities. Later as I digested these experiences with physically challenged people, I realized how similar they are to all of us in their aspirations, likes and dislikes. The administrators/managers there would tell us about how the physically challenged don't need our pity – they need specific and concrete assistance in particular tasks. A movie I saw later on - Sparsh - where Nasiruddin Shah is a blind teacher and principal of a blind school (IIRC), captured these aspects very well. One scene there which nicely captures the human aspects of physically challenged children which are common to all humanity is when the blind children are served food. They smell it and figure out that it is Aloo-Baingan [Aloo is potato and Baingan is Eggplant/Aubergine]. Then they chant in unison, “Haiy re kaise uljhan, phir se Aloo Baingan” ☺ [Oh what a problem! We again have potato and eggplant (dish/curry)].

I recall a very interesting rural project visit by the NSS group of Ruia. It was like a picnic outing cum work. Many of the NSS group participants in Ruia were from the Arts stream and were from rural Maharashtra. I became friends with them and learned quite a bit from this visit about ‘real’ rural Maharashtra. Teaching kids in slums and also, quite surprisingly for me then, visiting a family planning group/workshop in South Bombay (Nariman point IIRC) were other NSS activities that I recall. The family planning

workshop exposed me to the massive challenges the country faced in terms of controlling its population and the risks faced by the country if the population does not get controlled.

In hindsight, I think the NSS experience was crucial in exposing me to a world beyond my studies and books. I gained confidence in interaction with people in senior/management positions in the institutions that I would go to for rendering social service through NSS. I had tasted social service done by organizations and quite enjoyed participating in it.

A Prof. R.R. Sahuraja (IIRC) was a key moving force behind the NSS activities in Ruia. I think I found him to be an inspiring man in the little that I saw of him without having a clear appreciation of his role in shaping NSS activities in Ruia. When I looked up details on him on the Internet (in July 2013), I found that he is a Professor of Economics who became Principal of Podar college and is also a well known social worker. As Podar and Ruia were both under the top management of the same organization, Shikshan Prasarak Mandal, perhaps the NSS activities were, to some extent, done jointly. A short bio of Prof. Sahuraja is available here, <http://www.welingkar.org/welingkar/v1/faculty/detail-more.asp?FID=12>.

Other

Another source of inspiration from my Ruia college days was a speech by the US historian Will Durrant to passing out graduates in USA in 1958, (you may have to copy-paste/type the following url in the address bar of the browser:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20110517131157/http://www.willdurrant.com/youth.htm>). It was passed around by people from the Forum of Free Enterprise along with some of their own material IIRC. The Will Durrant speech was a very elegant one which was also very wise and down-to-basics when required. Nani Palkhiwala was the president of the Forum of Free Enterprise, Bombay, and I think there was an invitation to attend/read his comments on the nation's budget. I vaguely recall that I found Nani Palkhiwala's comments to be interesting though I don't think I would have understood many of the details.

I used to also spend a lot of time with my uncle's (Shri V.M.Raghu's) family in Chembur and got to know them and many people in their housing society (apartment buildings – my uncle & family lived in an apartment flat) very well. As mentioned earlier, Raghu uncle (Chitappa) was a younger brother of my father. IIRC, I used to spend a significant part of my vacation periods with them. My uncle was a marine engineer who had travelled the world when he was young. He had later joined Bombay Port Trust. He was an avid chess player and was a regular at the Matunga Gymkhana club (IIRC). He was quite fond of Soviet Russian grandmaster Mikhail Tal's approach,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Tal - I was not that serious a chess player to study games of famous chess players and their styles. I played a lot of chess with him and got to experience audacious chess strategies which sometimes led to him being defeated by me (which did not happen very often) but made the game very interesting. Perhaps I unconsciously and subtly learned a little about risk taking for spectacular

success possibilities from his style of chess. The worst case scenario here was that you could lose the game to a junior player – not a big deal really, if you get over the ego knock bit! [Later in life I tried something similar when I used to play a few games of chess with my nephew. I recall his joy at beating me 😊.]

I got quite close to the two sons of Raghu Chittappa as well as to my aunt, Vijayam Chithi, and received a lot of love and affection from them and am very grateful to them for that.

My father's sister (athai) and her husband Shri Mani, also lived in Chembur. I recall quite a few visits to their home as well as to the homes of their married daughters, and have received a lot of love and affection from them and am very grateful to them for that.

On my mother's side, her sister's family and her brother's family also lived in Bombay, and I used to visit them often and receive their love and care too. In particular I used to go for lunch from Ruia college to my aunt's (mother's sister named Krishnambal) house (apartment flat) in nearby Sion. I have received a lot of mother-like love from Krishnambal chitti (aunt) and a lot of love from her husband, Late Venkatachalam chitappa. Krishnambal chitti is still alive as I write this (12th April 2019). I offer her my deeply felt gratitude and love for all the love and care she showered on me. I am also deeply grateful to Late Venkatachalam chitappa.

Venkatachellam chitappa's brothers are Papa chitappa/mama and Sundaram chitappa/mama who live in Chembur. Krishnambal chitti is being looked after by them now. I too

have visited Papa and Sundaram mama's houses many times and received the love and affection of their large family and I am grateful to Papa and Sundaram mama and their entire family for it.

My elder sister's husband (my brother-in-law), his parents, brothers and sister were close to Krishnambal chitti and Venkatachalam chitappa. So I was acquainted with them before my elder sister got married. I have had many interactions with my brother-in-law's parents, before and after my sister's marriage and received a lot of love and affection from them. In particular, they had a spiritual inclination and so I have had interesting interactions with them on spirituality, especially with my brother-in-law's father, Late Shri Ramachandran. I have had many interactions with my elder sister and my brother-in-law, and received a lot of support, love and guidance from them. I also received the love and affection of my sister & brother-in-law's son, brother-in-law's brothers and sister. I am very grateful for this love and affection I received from my elder sister, brother-in-law, their son (my nephew) and my brother-in-law's parents and siblings.

I recall many visits to my mother's brother (Late) Shri R.L. Narasimhan (Narasu mama) and family's house (apartment flat) in Chembur, where I received their love and affection, and I am very grateful to them for that. I got quite close to my cousins then (Narasu mama had one son and one daughter).

While studying at Ruia college, I also used to, off and on, visit an uncle's house (apartment flat) in nearby Matunga. My uncle, Shri V.M.S. Mani, elder brother of my father (Periappa) and eldest son in my father's family, had passed away before

my Ruia college days, if I recall correctly. But my aunt (Periamma) was alive and always received me with warmth when I visited them. I also interacted a lot then with youngest son of my Periappa, my cousin brother, who was just a few years elder to me, and would be available at times in their home when I would visit. Once in a while, during my visits to their house, I would meet Periappa's elder son and three daughters and their husbands. I am grateful to my uncle Shri V.M.S. Mani and his family for the love and affection I have received from them.

There were/are many other elders in the family in Bombay – (Wadala) Doraiswamy mama & family, (Chembur) Manikkan mama & family, Worli Athai (athai-pati/grandmother) & family, (Chembur) Sundari chitti (chitti-pati) & family, (Chembur) Ramamoorthy anna (elder second cousin) & family, Kondhai chitappa-pata, (Mulund) Narayanswamy chitappa & family, (Mulund) Krishnamoorthy chitappa & family, Athai (I think sister of Narayanaswamy and Krishnamoorthy chitappas) & family (I came to know them well in Dombivli), (Mulund) Krishnan & brother & sister & their families, (Mulund) Balakrishnan chitappa, Rashappan chitappa and Sundaram chitappa & family, and others (I seek forgiveness from those whom I may have missed out naming here) - who provided love and care to me whenever I came across them or visited them, and I am grateful to them for their love and affection. [Note that for some reasons which I am not in a position to mention here, I have chosen to largely avoid naming relatives of my generation and limit myself to naming only my parents' generation and above.]

So though I lost my father at a young age, I had an extended family to fall back on, who, perhaps because I had lost my father at a young age, showered extra love and care on me. I am deeply grateful to all these family members who helped me during this period.

While in college itself, one of my father's brothers who lived in Secunderabad, Shri V.M. Vancheeswaran (Vanchi chitappa mentioned earlier), passed away. He had retired from South Central Railway as a senior Officer perhaps in Accounts or some other Administrative section. As he did not have any issue, I was rushed by flight along with and under guidance of a family elder (Manikkan chitappa of Chembur) to Secunderabad to do the final rites as the 'Karta' (main person doing the rituals). It was my first flight and in unhappy circumstances. Later some other family members joined in for the 13 day ceremony. It was quite an experience as there was fair bit of confusion – we did not have any relatives in Secunderabad besides my uncle and aunt. So lots of people not known to us but known to my aunt (and late uncle) were influencing matters. One particular ritual aspect I clearly recall was being asked to take a dip in a dirty lake where buffaloes were being washed some distance from where we were. I refused and that refusal was not taken well by the people involved. Perhaps they gave up on me as a Bombay fellow who does not respect religious traditions and agreed to me just sprinkling some of that water on my head! There was a lot of confusion about what my aunt would do after the ceremonies got over. Eventually she decided to (temporarily) move in with her elder sister who also lived in Bombay.

Vanchi chitappa, like Raghu chitappa, was a very intelligent person. As he lived in Secunderabad, my contact with him was lesser than the contact I had with Raghu chitappa. Typically I would interact with Vanchi chitappa only when he was visiting Bombay, which was quite often, and there was occasion for me to be visiting the place where he was staying. He was an asthmatic but did not let that asthma impact his activities too much. He would offer views and opinions on a variety of topics (like Raghu chitappa) and sometimes one could see that his asthma was making it slightly difficult for him to speak for long but he would not stop. I was more into listening mode with both Vanchi chitappa and Raghu chitappa as I was a student and perhaps as my family financial situation was not good, I lacked the courage to openly discuss matters with them. If they had lived longer, I am sure I would have loved to converse with them on various topics once I had found financial stability as a software development professional, and so had become a secure professional who was able to confidently articulate his views. But they had passed away by then.

Overall I had a variety of intellectual and emotional experiences in my young student days, during both school & college days. As I write about them, what strikes me is how vivid some of these boyhood memories of the emotional experiences are. I think the emotional experiences of human life touch far deeper into the psyche of the individual than the intellectual/analytical/logical activities/experiences of life. Perhaps, if reincarnation is true, which I believe it is, then it may be the emotional experiences of the past human life that

will make a far deeper impression on the new life than the purely intellectual part.

Software Development Career Starts Off

Once I took the decision to drop out, I had to come to terms with my ability to get a job. To test that I had written State Bank of India clerical exam and cleared the exam and interview, and was offered a job, which I decided not to take up. I also had approached, through some contacts, Patni Computers in Nariman Point (IIRC) for a Computer Operations job. I did well in the test & interview. I was offered the job but advised to seek a programming job instead of operations as they felt I was capable of doing that. But they did not offer me a trainee programmer or any other programmer job then. I took that as good encouragement and felt that I should explore programming job opportunities.

A relative of mine, Late Shri Ramamoorthy had done some programming (IIRC) in BSES (Bombay Suburban Electric Supply Ltd.), which I am given to understand was one of the first utility companies in India to adopt computerization for some of its activities. He was now a management consultant/faculty at some college(s). He also used to conduct workshops or something similar. I sought his help and he asked me to associate with his work which I did for some days in the capacity of a voluntary administrative assistant kind of guy. I think through him or somebody else I was referred to a book on COBOL. IIRC it was COBOL Programming by Roy and Dastidar (Jadavpur university). I think the initial parts of the book turned out to be rather easy reading. After having studied quantum physics, special relativity, thermodynamics, electronics etc. reading and understanding the initial parts of

the COBOL programming book turned out to be a cool walk in the park from an intellectual complexity point of view ☺. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Late Shri Ramamoorthy and his family for their love over the years, and Shri Ramamoorthy's encouragement to me during this time as I was exploring opportunities to get into software development profession.

Meanwhile a family friend in Dombivli who had done his M.Tech.(CS) from an IIT and who was then working with TCS (IIRC), and who had been kind enough to provide me important advice and encouragement regarding programming as a career, told me about an advertisement in a newspaper for trainee programmers which invited science graduates to apply. [BTW I had passed B.Sc. with a first class (from Bombay University).] Usually big company job advertisements would restrict trainee programmer positions to engineers or Computer Science degree holders. This advertisement was a big one (not a small 'wanted' ad.) and clearly from a large company. So this opportunity was a god-send.

I applied and also followed up my application by having a friendly word put in on my behalf to a senior person in Datamatics Ltd., by a close family friend of my aunt, Krishnambal chitti in Sion, who had served the senior person or knew him in some capacity. BTW it was normal to follow through such applications via some personal contacts. In later years, when I was in managerial positions, I too was told about some candidates. This kind of referral used to ensure that the referred candidate got a chance to prove himself/herself in a written test/interview. In a similar way, perhaps the senior person in Datamatics helped in me getting called for the

written test but I don't know for sure. I must have done decently in the written test as I got called for the interview and was later offered the job.

I joined Datamatics Limited, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datamatics>, <https://www.datamatics.com/>, as a trainee programmer in March 1984, when I was slightly less than 21 and a half years old. I had to sign a bond for 3 years and the salary was very measly the first six months/first year but increased significantly over the next two years. The initial salary (six months or a year) was less than Rs. 1000/-, IIRC! The office and training centre was in the then posh and elite export processing zone, SEEPZ, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEEPZ>, in Andheri (East). SEEPZ was spacious, quite picturesque but had fair amount of security and customs hassles for both entry and exit.

We were taught systems analysis & design and COBOL programming over an intense four months or so period. Top persons in the company would teach us system analysis and design. The person in charge of teaching us COBOL programming did a great job and took a lot of effort to teach us well. I took to programming like a duck takes to water and just loved to see results as per my intentions in the program. Bugs were a great challenge - a piece of detective business - and I enjoyed tracking/debugging most of them (from my programs and that of some colleagues too) and fixing them.

Datamatics had a tie-up with US minicomputer company, Wang Labs., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Laboratories,

<http://www.ricomputermuseum.org/Home/collections-gallery/wang-computer-gallery-2>.

Computer time or system time as we used to call it then was rationed. We worked on computer terminals which were connected to a mini-computer inside a separate heavily air-conditioned room. I think we were encouraged to print out the typed in programs and then manually check for both compilation and logical errors. This brought in a discipline of checking code on paper as against on terminal. The joy of getting an error-free compilation (after removal of compilation errors) and then, after some debugging usually, getting a successful run of a batch program or successful operation of an “on-line” program was indescribable! [A batch program would read from input data files, update data files and/or write to output data files with either no terminal interaction with the user or very limited interaction. An “on-line” program, may read from input data files, but would have significant amount of “screen” (which in today’s software technology will correspond to the term “form”) and keyboard (screen and keyboard together being referred to as terminal) interaction with the user, may update data files and/or create output files. The terminal, to all intents and purposes, was a ‘dumb’ terminal with all processing work being done on the mini-computer in the computer room. The mini-computer had the disk drives containing the data files, attached to it. We worked on a Wang VS 80 system, IIRC. Here are some pictures and info. about a similar Wang VS 85 system, <http://www.ricomputermuseum.org/Home/equipment/wang-vs85>.

There were quite a few retired from Indian armed forces people in Datamatics. As trainees we had a Group Captain who would ensure that we follow the rules which included learning typing from an outside agency (chosen by us with the fees paid being reimbursed by the company) and attaining some minimum words per minute speed. I think such discipline really helped us – I have been able to do the not-insignificant typing part of a software professional's job more efficiently and accurately because of being forced to learn five-finger typing from a professional typing training setup. Besides the Group Captain, there were Majors (at least two) in the technical and business side and a Brigadier who headed the Personnel section (and got us to sign on the dotted line for the training bonds). I liked and, to some extent, admired the walk and talk of these ex. Indian armed forces types.

[BTW after writing/passing the 12th standard board exam, a friend had encouraged me to, along with him, write Service Selection Board (SSB) entrance exam for Indian Air Force Pilot Officer posts. He said it would be a good experience even if we don't clear it. We cleared the written and got calls for the SSB interview – mine was at Dehradun. It was a weeklong affair, IIRC, and involved physical, psychological and other tests, along with getting a taste of armed forces life. I failed miserably in the physical/obstacle course as I had not even known about, let alone being prepared for, obstacles like Tiger's Leap, Tarzan's Jump, Monkey Bridge etc. But some chaps, especially those from Sainik schools, handled it quite comfortably – maybe they had trained for these obstacles. Only 2 guys from around 20 cleared and were asked to proceed to undergo the separately done medical test. Even though I

failed, it was a very interesting exposure to armed forces life. I still recall the dignity, athletic bearing and crisp speech of a senior Indian Air Force officer who addressed the eighteen or so of us who had not cleared the SSB interview/test and significantly lightened our disappointment, before we departed from the base in Dehradun.]

The Datamatics trainees who underwent the training together, as a batch, formed very close friendships, many of which have lasted to this day. Now in April 2019, I am a member of a closed Facebook group of ex Datamatics employees where I have shared a link to a draft version of this book, and got some encouraging comments. I think we viewed ourselves like a batch of students passing out from some academic setup with a professional job-oriented degree, except that our training was done by Datamatics (industry) and we did not get a formal degree/diploma. Most of us were science graduates though there were some commerce and engineering graduates too, IIRC. There were quite a few girls in the batch – so it was clearly a mixed gender group. I don't recall the batch size exactly – maybe 20 odd persons. Getting the opportunity to move into the “hot” area of software development/programming was a very big break for us. As we completed the training program, we grew in confidence as programmers. Most of us had never even touched a computer terminal before we started training! Now we could write not insignificant COBOL programs – in around 4 months time!

Collectively having grown this way gave us all a sense of great individual as well as collective achievement and joy. Senior “batches” in the company used to joke about our mistakes initially in a good-humoured way. As we matured they

considered us to be one of them. It was a very, very friendly and happy setup of young programmers in Datamatics. I did not realize this so much then but I think the mixed gender nature of the programmers group in Datamatics made it quite pleasant. I did not notice or hear about any gender bias. However, that is my male view and perhaps females may privately have held different views.

I am grateful to many Datamatics friends for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any Datamatics friend who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

I view Datamatics as my alma-mater in software development. I am very grateful to Datamatics for having taught me the vital skill of programming and having made me a practitioner of the sunrise profession of software development. Dr. Lalit S. Kanodia,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalit_Surajmal_Kanodia, was the key founder, entrepreneur and leader of Datamatics. I am very grateful to him for founding the company which taught me software development and gave me a good career platform.

After training we started on live projects. Very quickly I made a name for myself as a programmer - COBOL then on Wang-VS. [Please excuse me blowing my own bugle. I felt it important to capture these aspects of my journey accurately (from my point of view), even if it makes me seem immodest at times.]

My initial “live” projects were COBOL programming work for some (Persian) Gulf clients done in SEEPZ. I think one of the projects was for a motor vehicles registration government department of a Gulf country. I was able to do them quite well, I think. But I may have become over-confident as I recall one particular program which I did not test very well and whose bugs were reported to me by my team leader with quite some disappointment. I was quite embarrassed by the bugs and became more serious about testing my programs before handing it over to my project leader. I got exposed to real-life program specifications, various types of programs like simple Master maintenance ones and more complex transaction/processing ones. Time allotted for the programming varied depending on the complexity bucket the program had been put into.

Later I was sent to Datamatics’ Nariman Point office housed in a building called Embassy Centre. While I did not realize it properly then, I got exposed to life in the main business district of the country’s financial capital, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nariman_Point! Embassy Centre office (our office in it) was far more cramped than our SEEPZ office as space in Nariman Point was at a real premium. It was more of an operations center than a development center. Many customers would rent time at the Data Center there housing Wang-VS minicomputers. There was also Data Processing (DP) work that Datamatics would do for its customers which would involve programming as well as operations. Perhaps the biggest DP activity was related to registration and transfer of shares. Some of the new share issues that we handled would be mentioned in the financial pages of the Times of India!

I recall doing some modifications for share transfer programs as well as program(s) that did the allotment of shares for a new issue. It was quite complicated stuff. Far more complicated than the motor vehicle registration type project work that I had done earlier in SEEPZ. Understanding the existing program itself was perhaps the biggest challenge. Then I had to make modifications being careful that the changes done did not break the existing functionality of the program. The really scary part was that there would be an operations run of these programs and bugs could result in operations guys catching them and reporting it, which could be very embarrassing! The overall statistics ‘controls’ that the various programs in the system would print helped operations people get a top-view of the program run. These ‘controls’ allowed them to get some idea whether the program run was successful or not.

There was a lot of difference in atmosphere between the software development part of the office and the operations part. The software development part was quiet and somewhat focused whereas the operations part was a beehive of usually noisy activity. Operators would be loading and unloading “Disk packs” on computers in the air-conditioned computer room [I think the name used those days for such a room was ‘computer room’ but I am not sure – I don’t think the ‘server’ term was in vogue then and so we did not call it ‘server room’ (which is what is in vogue today).] IIRC, we then had 75 MB (not GB) removable disk packs, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disk_pack. In some parts of the operations section, heavy duty Wang line printers would be clattering away on huge bundles on continuous stationery. I could not find an appropriate image of the Wang line printers

we used then but this wiki page gives some info. and images about line printers in general:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Line_printer. [BTW it was a very proprietary computer setup those days. The computer, terminals, printers, disk packs, cables etc. would all have to be from Wang. It was not an open specifications world where one could mix and match various hardware components from various vendors to make up a computer system, at least the mini-computer and mainframe systems. Personal computers (PCs) were not yet that popular in Bombay/India.]

There were some high-tension moments too. The biggest shares issue till then (around 1985) in the history of Indian stock market was handled by Datamatics. The stock market authorities had a strict timeline within which shares had to be allotted and money refunded to those who did not get the allotment. But I don't recall whether this biggest issue was a public issue or a rights issue. If it was a rights issue then there may not have been any money refund issues.

The program ran into some problems. Programmers were called late at night to come fix the problem with some top people of Datamatics and the customer company breathing down their necks! IIRC, it turned out that the size of the data was such that the data file(s) (sequential and/or indexed data file(s) – relational database was not in vogue then, at least in India) spanned disk volumes which the program could not handle. The program got fixed within reasonable time.

Another bug, a silly one from a programming point of view but a serious operations problem was that of a program not initializing the address fields of an applicant while printing the

applicant's address. So for an applicant whose address took up fewer lines than the previous applicant's address, the last line(s) of the previous applicant's address got printed along with current applicant's address! This was for returning the application money to applicants who were not allotted shares (or not allotted the applied number of shares). Fortunately I think it got spotted in time by the operations people who would have screamed at the programmer(s)/manager for this foolish but serious bug and must have breathed fire down their necks till they fixed it.

All this exposure to stocks & shares and the money people were making from applying to new public issues of shares led me to try it out myself. I applied for and got allotted shares of a company called Orkay, IIRC. I held on to the shares for maybe a year or two and then sold it a nice premium. Hey, I had made some small, or rather tiny amount of, money on the stock market! Later I realized that what I had indulged in was almost like gambling based on tips from supposedly knowledgeable guys. It would have been far more mature and wiser if I had studied the company background and then decided to invest in the company by applying for its shares and expected return from dividends rather than blindly sell it once its stock market price reached a good level beyond my buying price. But that was how the stock market fever had gripped Bombay during those days [perhaps it may largely be the same even now]. Everybody wanted to get a piece of the action – including people who had no idea about shares, business or stock market like taxi drivers and young COBOL programmers (like me) and so relied on “hot tips” from “those in the know”! It was a crazy “gold rush” kind of thing.

In later years, the craziness of this kind of speculation would get brutally exposed. The Harshad Mehta scam in 1992, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harshad_Mehta, was perhaps the scam that showed people at large how manipulated and risk prone speculation in the Bombay Stock Exchange then was. Guys who relied on “hot tips” were many times the ‘bakras’ (sacrificial goats) who were getting duped by smart operators/scamsters who fed the market “hot tips” and ripped off the poor ‘bakras’ who got conned by the fed “hot tips”. Fortunately I did not get seriously trapped by the lure of playing the stock market and did not follow up my Orkay ‘tiny killing’ with many more such attempts.

I enjoyed the energy and can-do spirit of Nariman Point and surrounding business district/office areas of Mumbai. I used to enjoy visiting the area when I was a student and admire all the skyscrapers and busy looking people. The Arabian sea shore was a treat to watch along with fine hotels like Oberoi [The majestic Taj hotel is on the other side of the small strip of island jutting into the sea that South Bombay is.] Now I was a part of the Nariman Point crowd. The seat of government power in Maharashtra, namely Mantralaya, was quite close to Nariman point. The High Court, the Bombay Stock Exchange, the main cricket stadium in Bombay (Wankhade), main offices of the Times of India and Indian Express newspapers, Head quarters of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) etc. all were quite close to or in Nariman Point.

On weekday mornings, the suburban train terminus stations of Bombay VT (now known as Chhatrapathi Shivaji Terminus), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chhatrapati_Shivaji_Terminus_railway_station, on Central Railway and Churchgate,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Churchgate_railway_station, on Western Railway would disgorge huge numbers of mostly smartly dressed men and women purposefully and briskly walking to the exits on their way to Nariman Point, Fort (You may need to copy-paste the following url in the browser: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_\(Mumbai_precinct\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_(Mumbai_precinct))) and other South Bombay office locations. As a student I used to marvel at this sight and the beehive of activity that these railway stations would be during peak hours. Now I had become part of that community myself!

Though I did not comprehend it properly then, in a sense, I had arrived as a white-collar knowledge worker in the financial capital of the country. Even though my salary was not great, we would be allowed conveyance and snack allowance for overtime work which helped in some way ☺. I had come a long way from a dependent-on-family-support Physics student studying intricate and complex topics which seemed to be very distant from the jobs that I would see and hear people around me in Bombay work on and talk about.

Less than a year (IIRC) after I was sent to the Nariman point office of Datamatics, I was asked to go back to its SEEPZ office and take up the task of being the main COBOL programming trainer for the next batch! Most of the batch fellows were management graduates who were either as old as me or elder to me. It was quite a psychological challenge to stand in front of them and teach. I think I managed to do a decent job of it. In 2018, when I reconnected to one of the guys in this batch, a Chartered Accountant, his way of confirming who I was, was asking me whether I was their group teacher! ☺.

Later I was asked to attend a VS Assembler training program conducted by a senior techie of Datamatics, as I think Wang Labs. was looking for VS Assembler programmers to be sent on contract assignments to their offices in USA & Europe. I think I did quite well in this training program. I loved reading the mini-computer (processor/assembly) instructions manual and figuring out how things are done at the low instruction level. Suddenly the track changed and three of us were told that we were being sent on assignment to Wang's telecommunications research centre in Brussels, Belgium and would need to learn 'C' programming. We were given a copy of the K&R C book [The C Programming Language by Brian W. Kernighan and Dennis M. Ritchie, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_C_Programming_Language] and a computer (PC type) with the C compiler, and a month for self-learning! Shortly after the month or so of self-learning, the three of us found ourselves on an international flight, my first international flight, out of Bombay to Brussels sometime in 1985! We were given advice by a senior director that we should avoid talking about two things - politics and religion ☺.

For traveling abroad I was given extra allowance to stitch a suit which I did. So I was suited (for the first time in my life) and booted when I boarded that flight out of Bombay to Europe. My family had come to the airport to see my off and it was quite a happy event. But mother seemed to have had some pangs of separation which I did not catch well then. The first assignment in Brussels lasted for one year and 3 months or so with a break in between when I returned to India. Technically I got into 'C' language programming in a big way - doing an application layer component of private Videotex system for

Wang. Socially I got exposed to Europe but faced language problems as I did not know French. As Brussels was an important centre in Europe with lots of foreigners, English did get understood by quite some people. With the first foreign trip, though we were paid only a living allowance (500 USD equivalent IIRC) but with free accommodation, as my salary in India was being paid in full, the financial picture brightened significantly.

Given below are compressed pics with some data elided (blanked), of my first passport issued on 20th March 1985 with my picture which may have been taken some months earlier, sometime in 1984. I think I would have been around 22 yrs old when my below passport pic was taken. My profession is correctly stated as computer programmer. I do not have pictures of me from earlier. Further the passport & driving license pics that I have with me from those days are because I have these important documents with me. Otherwise I think I would have not had even those pics!

My Belgian visa for this first foreign trip of mine is also shown below. Larger version of these pics and other related pics can be seen in these two posts:

- 1) Some old pics of me (Ravi S. Iyer),
<https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/some-old-pics-of-me.html>, 25th Dec. 2018
- 2) Documenting my part auto bio with pics - the Visa trail as documentation of my foreign trips,
<https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics.html>, 26th Dec. 2018

I felt it appropriate to share some extracts of the second post mentioned above:

From mid 1985 to end 1991, a six and a half year period, which would map to my age of around 23 to 29, I spent around 3.5 years abroad which is over half the time period, and remaining period in India mainly working on foreign software development project work from Indian company offices in Bombay. The foreign trips were to Western Europe, USA and Far East Asia. This had a profound mind-broadening impact on me and made me feel that I am a global citizen. I was largely able to relate to India, and at the same time, relate to Western world (USA and Western Europe) and, to a lesser extent due to lesser time spent there, the Far East Asian tiger (economy-wise) countries. I mean, I was quite at home in living and working in all of these places and having a good time - no problem at all!

As my health problems became significant from 1992 onwards, my life orientation changed. Spirituality became a key interest area in my life from end 1992 onwards with my software career taking a less important role than earlier. Partly due to health issues and partly out of choice, I did not go abroad i.e. visit any foreign country from 1992 onwards.

I guess I am a somewhat strange person now and was somewhat strange during the days of my foreign travel as well. Somehow I did not get into taking pics when I was doing my foreign travel. I chose instead to deeply experience my visits rather than capture them on a camera. Even today, I have clear recollections of many things from my foreign visits. As an example, from my first trip to Niagara Falls, USA (and

Canada) in the second half of the 1980s, perhaps in 1987, I still recall quite clearly how I was stunned and awestruck when I had my first sight of the big and great Niagara Falls.

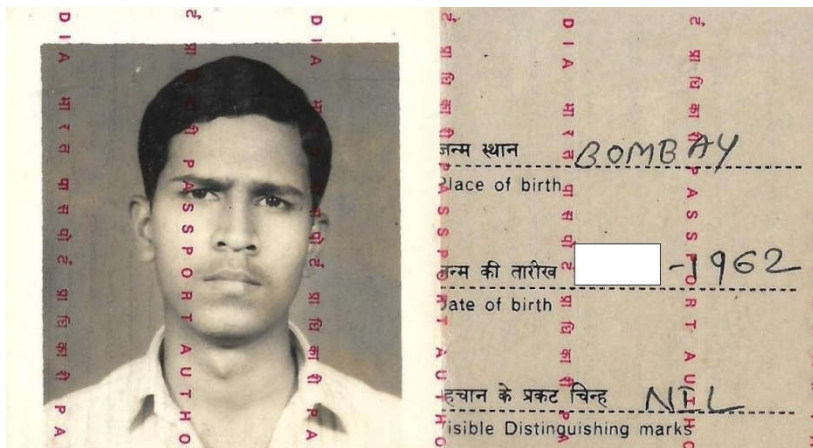
These were pre-Internet days for the wider public. I would have seen some pics of Niagara Falls but I had not realized it was so big. There was a big roar of sound as we were approaching the viewing area (USA side) from the parking lot but it did not prepare me for the huge volume of water and the height from which it fell, at Niagara Falls. I think I was talking to my friends while we were walking to the viewing area and suddenly the awesome Niagara Falls came into view. I was spell bound and completely awestruck.

So Niagara Falls experience is still accessible in my mind, around three decades after I saw it first, but I don't have any pics of me at Niagara Falls! Including such pics would lend more life to the part auto bio.

But what I have are my passport visas! It does provide an official documentation of my visits. So I thought I should include them/some of them as pics with sensitive info. masked, in the ebook. At least it will give some corroboration info. to the ebook reader that I did make those foreign visits.

I thought of also sharing them here. Readers may please feel free to ignore these pics :-).

--- end extracts ---



This first foreign stay starting from sometime in 1985 of over a year in Brussels, a major European capital, made a tremendous impact on my life. The sheer material prosperity that I saw and the far superior standard of living of almost everybody I saw in the city, as compared to what I had seen in Bombay and

Dombivli, did make me admire Brussels. I used to travel by bus & tram to work and to visit other places in the city. I also used the metro when needed. What a world of difference there was between Brussels suburban transport and Bombay suburban transport! Shops were so well organized and clean. The city itself was so well maintained as compared to even Bombay, let alone Dombivli. Yes, I had seen all these aspects in movies and read about it in books but experiencing it for over a year made these differences so vivid and so real.

The colleagues in the office, Wang International Telecommunications Research Centre (Wang ITRC), were mostly Flemish (a variant of Dutch) speaking Belgians and a few French speaking Belgians. There were some foreign immigrant to Belgium types too – one was Iranian/Iraqi, who was also very friendly. It was a small group of people – maybe 20 to 30 odd. Bulk of the office staff seemed to be very proficient technically – perhaps they were all well qualified and trained telecommunications and software engineers/researchers. At technical level my immediate boss was a Mr. Jan Wirix. The higher level technical boss was, IIRC, a Hungarian, Mr. Georges Fodor.

Jan gave all three of us some ‘C’ programming assignment(s) and a few weeks to do it, IIRC. We were told that if we are able to do it satisfactorily we were on, else we go back ☺. We slogged away and did what seems to have been a satisfactory job and so we were accepted in the team.

I was given the job of developing the Order Entry response pages of a private Videotex system, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Videotex>, for Wang. Videotex

delivered information to the user over the telephone line as pages of text to typically a Television set but it could also be a special Videotex terminal I believe. User input to the system was through a small key pad in case of Television – the special Videotex terminal seems to have had its own keypad. The assignment was a great learning experience for me. My stuff was on the application layer of the networking stack. The Internet was not widespread or well-known then. How far have network connectivity and reliability, and network products come now! The Internet is being considered a revolutionary force by many. This has been utterly mind-boggling change having unbelievably high level of social impact/transformation in a matter of just a few decades.

But at that time, the telecommunication stuff that I saw in Wang ITRC was very sophisticated stuff to me. On the software side, you had people who exuded technical confidence handling layers of the network stack like transport layer, sessions layer etc. of the Videotex product. The lab./server rooms kind of place was full of equipment some of which had their covers removed. Having had a COBOL programming applications background so far, hardware was a very unknown area to me. At Datamatics we had hardware engineers who would handle any hardware related issues. Here at Wang ITRC, the same guy would handle both software and was knowledgeable enough usually to handle quite a bit of hardware issues himself. I was quite in awe of them considering that I knew almost nothing then about opening up a computer and dismantling and re-assembling its parts. [I learned a lot about it after I moved to Puttaparthi. I was forced to repair my home computer as the very few computer repair

chaps in Puttaparthi were quite hard-to-get or not-so-knowledgeable and so I learned a fair bit about fixing PC hardware problems.]

Modems were the strange things to me then which was very important in the lab. there as external users would use their telephone lines to connect to the Videotex system running on computers in the lab, IIRC. I lacked the theoretical background to understand the role the modem played then. But these chaps were so fluent in talking about it and other networking jargon that I felt myself to be quite ignorant about networking. I recall the term ‘null modem’ being bandied about and me wondering what it is.

Anyway, I learned later that I did not need to know all this stuff for my work which was at a top layer. I had to simply focus on understanding the services the layer immediately below my stuff, that is the presentation layer, offers. For that I needed to read the documentation put out by the person doing the presentation layer and interact with him to get my doubts clarified. For the specification of my Order Entry module, I was given a product definition document by Jan. I had to understand that, put out some documents related to design and then get the job done in ‘C’ programming language using the Presentation layer services. That’s it. The rest of the Videotex product stuff was something that I could learn for my own knowledge improvement including the hardware, networking jargon, modems, making a null modem etc., if I wanted but it was not necessary. I tended to learn more about the networking software bit like the OSI layers (perhaps I did some reading of Tanenbaum’s Computer Networks book on it then) than the hardware part like wiring up a null modem.

I learned a lot of ‘C’ programming then. My initial version of the software used global variables all over the place! That came from my COBOL programming background. I had not understood the advantages of information hiding by using automatic variables and reducing global variables to an absolute minimum. As I faced bugs during testing I realized what a headache it had become to debug the program due to lack of a structured programming approach. I had some extra time on my hands as others in the team needed more time to get their pieces done. I completely redesigned my module using the structured programming approach that ‘C’ provides, extensively using automatic variables (information hiding) and reducing global variables to an absolute minimum. The redesigned program got done in a few weeks time even though the first version had taken many months to do. By now I was so clear about the module that what had taken me months to do initially I could redo in a structured way in a matter of weeks! The K&R ‘C’ book was my bible during this period. I don’t think I have studied any technical book as closely and as many times as I have studied this book. What a masterpiece of a technical book! From the book’s wiki page, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_C_Programming_Language, “The book was central to the development and popularization of the C programming language and is still widely read and used today. Because the book was co-authored by the original language designer, and because the first edition of the book served for many years as the de facto standard for the language, the book was regarded by many to be the authoritative reference on C.”

I also learned a great lesson about version control and the right attitude to customer reported bugs. IIRC some travel agents/companies were beta customers for the Wang VS Videotex product of ours. One London, UK, beta site reported a problem with a Videotex page which was a response page (as against a static page) and so my Order Entry module came into play. I was given the dump data with the problem description from the customer. This dealt with an earlier version of my module. I tried to recreate the problem using the latest version of my Order Entry module but could not recreate the problem. So I concluded that whatever problem the beta site customer had has been solved. Further I did the very, very stupid act of deleting the customer dump data.

Georges (boss of the technical team to whom Jan reported) called me and lectured me that I did not fix the bug but made it disappear (hid it)! I stuck to my guns. I was a real over-confident fellow then about some things. I felt I know my stuff well and I am right in this matter. Georges wouldn't let go. The lecture went for an hour, IIRC! But I did not relent – what a foolish fellow I was then!

Later a similar problem was reported by someone else and it turned out that response pages tended to have a large chunk of data to be sent across the wire, and when the chunk of data exceeded a particular limit (4K IIRC), the transport layer function failed. That resulted in the connection getting cut which was also what happened in the bug reported to me earlier. The transport layer issue got fixed.

When I heard all this, I realized that if I had done my bug analysis properly maybe this issue would have been discovered

earlier. By not doing a proper analysis and then deleting the data related to the error, I had committed a cardinal sin in software development. I was very embarrassed but I don't think I had the courage of character then to go up to Georges and acknowledge my mistake. Today if I come across Georges on the net somewhere I think I would like to acknowledge that mistake (I wonder if he would remember it though)!

I also learned how important it was to test return codes from functions and handle error conditions. Handling error conditions and capturing it in a status log was not trivial – sometimes it took significant chunk of time. But code that did it was far more robust and amenable to easy analysis of behavior of the code. I don't think I learned all of the vital aspects of error handling in this assignment itself but I did learn a significant part of it and had realized how vital it is for developing reliable code.

After the redesign of the code I came to really like the code I had done. I was proud of it – to me it was a thing of beauty as well as functional performance. I had started on my journey of doing not just functional software but elegant software (including elegant code) that could get appreciated by myself and others – that I could be proud of having done.

All the colleagues were very helpful to the three of us. In particular there were two secretaries (ladies), a senior one and a junior one. Both of them took particular care of ensuring that we settled down. They were very friendly and I even visited the home of at least one of them. Some of the other colleagues invited us to their homes. One colleague's home was far away in French speaking Belgium and so he would stay during the

week in a flat/small place in Brussels and go on weekends to his home and family. That person became very friendly with us and we used to spend fair amount of evening time together. He also invited all three of us to his home on some weekend which I still recall as we enjoyed that visit.

I enjoyed going around Brussels. I visited Grand Place (Central Square), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Place, so many times that it became very familiar to me. One Polish run pub close to our apartment was a regular haunt for some drinks and food. Brussels was very friendly even though we did not know French. So I used to wander around quite a bit in Brussels city. We came to know some other English speaking foreigners in Brussels through one of us (not me) attending a spoken French learning course. Some were techies but some were governesses type too. The entire group became quite friendly. There was an English guy, couple of Australians, a Scottish girl (Liz who was a very jovial and good natured person) and a German girl that I clearly recall. In the apartment we used to watch a lot of BBC TV as we could not understand the French and Flemish TV stations. There were multiple BBC TV channels we could see – I used to regularly view both the news channel and the one having the serials. Watching the serials gave some idea (perhaps exaggerated like Indian serials) of typical contemporary English life.

I loved the cathedrals of Brussels. Some of them almost cast an enchanting spell on me. But most of the time they would be empty. When I would ask my foreign colleagues and friends about the Christian faith most would be uninterested! Spirituality and religion seemed to just put most of them off. What a vast difference there was between Brussels and

Bombay (and Dombivli) in this regard - Bombay (and Dombivli) was (were) spiritually and religiously vibrant.

We travelled a little within Belgium – I recall Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp visits. But we would travel by train and that was quite expensive for us – we did not have a car. The trains were a real marvel as compared to Indian trains. The ride was so smooth and the speeds were phenomenal. Bruges and Ghent were beautiful and very historic places – I thoroughly enjoyed my visits to it. We also travelled a couple of times (weekend visits) to London where we had Datamatics colleagues working on assignments with other clients. They used to visit us at Brussels too. We were invited to a French girl's wedding in France close to the Belgian border but our visa applications were turned down by the French embassy/consulate!

One significant problem during my Brussels assignment was related to the falling US Dollar rate against the Belgian Franc. Over months we saw that our net Belgian Francs living allowance had reduced significantly from what we got at the beginning of the assignment as we were paid in US Dollars which was steadily depreciating against the Belgian Franc! I started protesting and requesting that we be paid in Belgian Francs and that the amount should be what we got after conversion during the first months of our assignment. Neither Wang ITRC management nor Datamatics would have any of it. But I was prepared to fly back to India and mentioned the same IIRC – I had a paid return ticket anyway! It created a lot of friction between me and the top Wang ITRC manager as well as Datamatics top managers back in SEEPZ, Mumbai. I don't recall how it got finally resolved but I continued on to finish the assignment. I do recall that on return back to India

after the assignment I was cold-shouldered for some time by Datamatics management to let me know that such behavior is unacceptable.

Today I think I had over-reacted then. Yes, my issue may have been genuine but then it was not as if I was starving due to the allowance getting reduced. I could have fought with my company back home in India but not escalated it to the customer. If the company back home did not oblige I should have postponed taking action till I got back to India. One personality trait I have is that I feel very strongly about being treated unfairly and cannot easily control my reactions to unfair treatment. While I have matured quite a bit over the years and have significantly increased my tolerance limit for unfair treatment, it is still a lower limit than that of many of my friends and colleagues. Maybe I have some activist gene somewhere in my DNA ☺.

There were some minor issues too (not related to company work). Once there was an explosion close to our apartment. Perhaps earlier than that too there may have been some similar problems. That heightened police activities around our apartment area which was on a well known downtown kind-of road in Brussels, Avenue Louise, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avenue_Louise. The police would draw up to us in their van while we were walking on the road and ask us foreigner-looking people to show our papers – once we showed them there was no problem. The Heysel football fans tragedy, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heysel_Stadium_disaster, involving English fans had happened either a little before we

went to Brussels or just after. English football fans then were considered to be terrible hooligans by some Brussels people.

The only time I recall facing direct/overt aggressive racism issue during my European stay was when we travelled by ferry from Oostend to Dover in England. Some English football fans were with us. At the Oostend ferry station itself, on seeing us, they started chanting what I vaguely recall as, “if they are black send them back” or something like that (the English was heavily accented). We were brown and not black but perhaps they did not have a good enough chant for brown! It took me some time to realize that they were chanting because of us or at us! It did not escalate further as we kept quiet. Later on the boat, one of them called me Gandhi but not in a very offensive way and asked me to take a snap of theirs which I obliged them with. He then said that “I am OK”. Well, I neither asked for nor wanted his OK but I did not press the issue. I (and the two colleagues of mine) was (were) neutral in the whole affair, neither getting provoked nor provoking them – maybe that did the trick in the issue not getting out of hand. Never once did I face similar aggressive and overt racism in all my stay of around one and a quarter years in Brussels. [This is not to say that such incidents did not happen then in Brussels – all I am saying is that I did not experience it then.] I think what I had experienced in brief and what I had heard about racism in England made me avoid taking up any long assignments in England despite the many, many English authors that I had read and admired.

Space shuttle Challenger disaster, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_Shuttle_Challenger_disaster, happened while I was in Brussels. It did cause fair bit of despair/disappointment even in Brussels – I recall an American stranger telling me about it in a Pizza joint that we were in. Then we had the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl_disaster. The media was talking about wind directions and speeds in the context of contamination spread. There was palpable fear and concern about it in Europe. These and other events showed me the weaknesses and faults in the technological achievements area of US, Soviet Union and Europe. They were certainly way, way ahead of countries like India in this regard but they certainly were not perfect.

Interaction with home was mainly through letters as phone was very expensive and meant to be used only for emergencies. I was somewhat lazy in writing letters which caused a lot of anguish to mother. I think she missed me a lot – I was too taken up by my European experience to miss my family that much.

A few extracts (slightly edited) from my blog post <http://ravisyermisc.blogspot.com/2019/02/the-horrors-that-nazi-germans-inflicted.html>, dated 23rd Feb. 2019 :

In my stay in Brussels, Belgium for around 15 months in 1985-86, I frequented a Polish run pub near to the studio flat (with cleaning service and so somewhat like a hotel) provided by my customer company Wang International Telecommunications Research Centre, on Avenue Louise.

The pub was on one of the side streets off Avenue Louise opposite to my studio flat building. I tried to quickly go through Google Map of the area to spot a similar pub in it but did not get one in my quick search. I guess, in all probability, they would have moved on.

Two Polish guys were the main chaps who ran the pub. I think they may have been brothers and one of them seems to have been married with his wife helping out with some of the pub work. They were very friendly people. The Polish men may have been in their thirties - I was around 23 years old then. I have very happy memories of my many visits to this Polish run pub. It was like a somewhat regular eating place for me (usually non-veg as veg was not really on the menu) and some drink like beer or wine. The Polish men spoke English, if I recall correctly and perhaps not fluently but they could follow my/our English, which made things very convenient for me (and my two colleagues from my Bombay company, Datamatics).

...

For those who are interested, this is how 212 Avenue Louise building where our studio flats were located, looks like now on Google View:

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Avenue+Louise+212,+1050+Bruxelles,+Belgium> While there have been some changes, I do recognize the area from what I recall of it then. Now the building seems to be a hotel called ibis Styles Bruxelles Louise hotel. I don't think that was the name then. Note that our studio flats were serviced by staff (cleaning etc.) and so it was somewhat like a hotel room. But I don't recall it to be a regular

hotel like it is now - however I am not sure of my recollections in this regard.

We were three guys sent to Brussels by our Mumbai/Bombay software company, Datamatics and we were provided two studio flats connected to each other, with four beds.

Some pics from its website: The entrance to the building:
<https://www.hotel-ibisstyles-bruxelles.com/images/galerie-hotel/JPEG/2812-63.jpg>.

How the building profile looks: <https://www.hotel-ibisstyles-bruxelles.com/images/galerie-hotel/JPEG/3336-37.jpg> (this I think is quite the same like then - we could see Avenue Louise from french windows on one side of our connected studio-flats.)

--- end extracts from my blog post ---

By the time I finished my Brussels assignment, I had tasted and been exposed to a fair part of European life. It had broadened my mind very much. I now had the confidence to interact with foreign software guys and do work/business in any Western country. Unfortunately the freedom of living abroad led me to try out both smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol (wine and beer) and form a habit of it. I came back to India with some expertise in rolling cigarettes using cigarette paper, tobacco and a cigarette roller, as well as in smoking a pipe with some fancy pipe tobacco! I was foolish enough to smoke the pipe in Datamatics' office in SEEPZ, Mumbai. Earlier I used to cringe with shame and horror when these foolishnesses of mine came to mind. But now I just laugh at my foolishness then. Eventually, some years down the line, I

was forced to quit both smoking and drinking alcohol by health problems - the habits had done their damage.

After this first foreign trip ended, as I had by that time spent over 2 years in the company, the salary as per the training bond had increased significantly. I also had saved some money from the living allowance I had received in Belgium. Financial constraints were receding now in my life. Affording first class suburban railway travel etc. was no problem whatsoever. I could buy books (as against borrow from a library). Family including the extended family started treating me with a lot of respect as I was a significant bread-earner and 'foreign-returned'. In our extended family, very few people had been abroad then [Now it is a very different story, of course. Going abroad is nothing great within my extended family now with some of my relatives having settled abroad.] An uncle was a marine engineer and maybe one or two next-level uncles had traveled abroad but not lived there for long. So I was quite a success from the extended family point of view too.

The three year bond period ended. Datamatics gave a solid raise to the salary. I wanted to explore my possibilities in the job market. BTW for most of this time I had worked in the SEEPZ (export zone, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEEPZ>) office of the company for export customers (including assignments abroad) but I also spent some time in its Nariman Point office for domestic customers. Tata Unisys Ltd. (previously known as Tata Burroughs Ltd.) and TCS (Tata Consultancy Services) were the big draw then as the top software consultancy companies in Bombay. I wanted to test myself with them. I went through the process of applying, written test, interview ... I was happy to clear interviews with

both TUL and TCS but the salary they offered was lesser than what Datamatics was paying me! I decided to stick to Datamatics as they were willing to give me work that I was interested in besides paying me well.

I think this was the time when I had really become a self-confident man. I was out of the bond. I had the application and systems software programming experience, was able to get a job with the top-notch Indian software companies even though I did not have a Computer Science or even an engineering qualification. [“Only a BSc.” is how many academically well qualified snobs in India would describe it :).] I had lived abroad; made some friends there. And I was 24 years and a few months old. In the next three years and some months (till 1990) that I was with Datamatics I went abroad to USA for 2 assignments for a total of over one and a half years (maybe the first US assignment started before my bond period expired); went to Netherlands for 2 months for a study; executed off-shore projects in India for foreign customers Most of the work I did in these three years were systems software type: SMTP gateway, Network operating system backup program , Word processing utilities, study of Windowing systems - X-Windows, Microsoft Windows ... Programming languages mainly used were C, Wang VS Assembler (similar to IBM 360 Assembler, I was informed), PL/1 and some small exposure to C++.

[The two USA stints mentioned above were big events in my life as I got wonderful exposure to USA and the good life in USA. I had access to a car and along with my friends drove extensively in some parts of the USA. For most of the totally around 19 month period of my two Wang Labs. Lowell, USA

assignments, I was provided living quarters in Royal Crest, Nashua, New Hampshire. One apartment had two bedrooms and was shared by two of us. Here are some pics of Royal Crest Nashua from their website (takes a little time to load): <https://www.royalcrestnashua.com/en/apartments/photo-gallery.html>. As of now, I am not in a position to write more about my USA assignment stints. Hopefully, a future update to this book should cover more about them and their great impact on me.]

Given below is a compressed pic with some data elided (blanked), of my USA visa for first USA trip. This is followed by compressed pics of my second passport issued on 9th October 1989. I think I would have been around 26 yrs old (running 27) when my below passport pic was taken. My profession by then was higher up the software development ladder than programmer - I was an analyst and a designer as well as a project leader. So the initial entry of computer programmer was corrected to computer professional. Larger version of these pics and other related pics can be seen in these two posts:

- 1) Some old pics of me (Ravi S. Iyer), <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/some-old-pics-of-me.html>, 25th Dec. 2018
- 2) Documenting my part auto bio with pics - the Visa trail as documentation of my foreign trips, <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics.html>, 26th Dec. 2018

U. S. IMMIGRATION
020 BOS. 62

MAR 1 1987

वीजा / VISAS

No. **107029** Class

THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA
NONIMMIGRANT VISA
ISSUED AT

BOMBAY

B-1B-2 18 FEB 1987
CLASSIFICATION DATE ISSUED

VALID FOR **MULTIPLE**
APPLICATIONS FOR ENTRY UNTIL


17 AUG 1987

ISSUED TO **BEARER(X)**

Nancy C. Abell

CONSULAR OFFICE

17



इसके द्वारा, भारत गणराज्य के राष्ट्रपति के नाम पर, उन सब से
 भिन्नका इतर बात से संस्कार हो, यह प्रार्थना एवं अपेक्षा की जाती है कि
 वे बाह्य को बिना रोक - टोक, आज़ादी से आने - जाने दें, और उसे हर
 तरह की ऐसी सहायता और सुरक्षा प्रदान करें जिसकी उसे आवश्यकता हो।

These are to request and require in the Name of The
 President of the Republic of India all those whom it may
 concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or
 hindrance, and to afford him or her every assistance and
 protection of which he or she may stand in need.

Given at Bombay _____
 on 9TH OCTOBER 89 _____ को दिया गया

भारत गणराज्य के राष्ट्रपति के आदेश से दिया गया
 BY ORDER OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA

अधिकारी - Superintendent
क्षेत्रीय पासपोर्ट कार्यालय, बम्बई
Regional Passport Office, Bombay

पासपोर्ट
PASSPORT
भारत
INDIA

नाम ZYER RAVI SURYANARAYANAN
 NAME _____

_____ को साथ हैं जिनके विवरण नीचे दिए गए हैं।
 ACCOMPANIED BY _____ CHILDREN WHOSE
 PARTICULARS ARE MENTIONED BELOW.

नाम NAME	क्रम की तारीख DATE OF BIRTH	लिंग / लड़की MALE / FEMALE

राष्ट्रियता
 NATIONAL STATUS भारत का भारतीय
CITIZEN OF INDIA पृष्ठों की संख्या 36 हैं।
 containing 36 pages.

Computer Professional
 विवरण / DESCRIPTION (SP-3)
Computer Programmer
 व्यवसाय Profession (SP-9)

लिंग MALE **Sex**
 अधिवास INDIA **Domicile**
 रंग Black **Colour**
 आँखों का रंग Black **Colour of eyes**
 बालों का रंग Black **Colour of hair**

पिता / ~~माता~~ मान LATE: SURYANARAYANAN
 Name of father/husband

स्थायी पता NO-2 GANGA NIWAS BLDG
44RE ROAD, DOMBIVLI (E)
THANE (M.S.) 421201
 Permanent Address

मान्य अपना दुर्घटना की स्थिति में जिस सम्बन्धी अपना गिर को सूचना
 देनी हो उसके विवरण।
 Particulars of relative/trand to be intimated in event of death or accident.

नाम VISHWANATH ZYER
 Name

पता same as above
 Address

सम्बन्ध BROTHER **Relationship** वैजीपीन नम्बर 2 **Telo. No.**

Computer Professional
 विवरण / DESCRIPTION (SP-3)
Computer Programmer
 व्यवसाय Profession (SP-9)

लिंग MALE **Sex**
 अधिवास INDIA **Domicile**
 रंग Black **Colour**
 आँखों का रंग Black **Colour of eyes**
 बालों का रंग Black **Colour of hair**

पिता / ~~माता~~ मान LATE: SURYANARAYANAN
 Name of father/husband

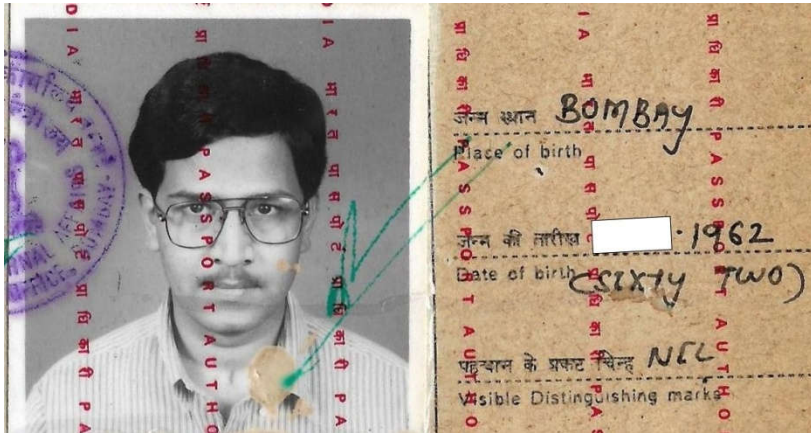
स्थायी पता NO-2 GANGA NIWAS BLDG
44RE ROAD, DOMBIVLI (E)
THANE (M.S.) 421201
 Permanent Address

मान्य अपना दुर्घटना की स्थिति में जिस सम्बन्धी अपना गिर को सूचना
 देनी हो उसके विवरण।
 Particulars of relative/trand to be intimated in event of death or accident.

नाम VISHWANATH ZYER
 Name

पता same as above
 Address

सम्बन्ध BROTHER **Relationship** वैजीपीन नम्बर 2 **Telo. No.**



I have given below compressed pics of some appreciation letters and experience letters related to my Datamatics stint which included assignments to Wang Labs. The appreciation letters are both for my Sept. 1988 to Sept. 1989 stint with Open/Server project which was a LAN Server based on the Banyan VINES Network Operating System, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banyan_VINES. John Kowalonek headed the project. Robert Verbanas was a team member of the project. I take this opportunity to thank John Kowalonek, William Reynolds (my immediate boss in the Open/Server project), Robert Verbanas, Howard Finn and others at Wang Labs. Lowell that I interacted with over two different assignments, for the wonderful help and camaraderie they provided in a professional work environment.

Larger version of these pics as well as of other documents related to my work experience can be seen here: Documenting my part auto bio with pics - computer software industry appreciation and experience letters,

WANG LABORATORIES, INC. ONE INDUSTRIAL AVENUE, LOWELL, MA 01851 • TEL: 508/459-5000 TELEX: 172108

WANG

To whomsoever it may concern

Mr. Ravi Iyer worked on the OPEN/Server project as a Level II Software Engineer from September 1988 to September 1989. The product is a state of the art LAN server, based on the Banyan Vines Networking Operating System.

The original Banyan version runs under UNIX, whereas the Wang implementation runs on the VS platform, under VS/OS. Mr. Iyer was responsible for the Backup/Restore component. Due to the enormous differences between the two operating systems, the range of disk and tape devices supported on the VS and the need to co-exist with other VS products, a straight-forward port had not been possible. Mr. Iyer's excellent designing ability has enabled the product to provide several features not available on the original such as cataloguing, disk backups, application program interface support and also hooks for critical future enhancements like network backup and restore operations.

Mr. Iyer has a remarkable capacity to understand requirements, is dedicated and is extremely hard working. On the few occasions when he encountered technical issues in areas that he had no prior expertise in, Mr. Iyer had the enthusiasm and determination to learn quickly. He has demonstrated abilities to design, develop and test a very complex product and is productive when working independently or as a team member. Besides his work with Backup/Restore, Mr. Iyer provided valuable suggestions and acted as a technical source for several of the other components of the product. His contribution has been significant to the successful development of OPEN/Server and it has been a pleasure to have such a professional on our team.



(John A. Kowalonek,
Director,
OPEN/Server Development)

WANG

TO: Whom It May Concern

FROM: Robert Verbanas - Sr. Software Engineer

Wang Laboratories
Lowell Massachusetts, 01851
Work Phone: 508-967-8780
Home Phone: 617-

SUBJECT: Letter Of Recommendation for Ravi Iyer

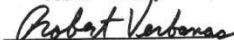
DATE: March 22, 1990

I'd like to take this opportunity to say what a pleasure it was working with Ravi. His ability to sift through the manuals and people (managers and workers alike) to determine the real needs, and the best approaches was outstanding. Afterwards he would then present us with the pros and cons of each approach, as well as a timeline for the design, development, and integration. Ravi's dedicated and joyful personality also deserves mention, this was certainly appreciated during some of our tougher times. Ravi was a well liked and respected member of our R+D team immediately, and we all very much enjoyed working with him.

Technically Ravi has a very indepth knowledge of many platforms: (PC, VS, UNIX, Banyan) and all the associated languages (Assembly, C, PL1, RPC, API), protocols, and formats supported by these systems. Although these are the areas that I worked on with Ravi, I am sure that his expertise is not limited these areas.

As you have probably gathered I could elaborate further on his outstanding contributions, but rather than that I'd like to extend an offer to call me (collect if you like - I'd only do this for Ravi) to let you know more, he's one hell of a dedicated and talented guy. Lastly I'd like to say that we miss him, and wish him all the best. My only regret is that he's not still here, he certainly makes a great addition to any team, technically, personally, or otherwise.

Yours Truly



Robert Verbanas

WANG

Mailstop 014-790
Wang Laboratories Inc.
One Industrial Avenue
Lowell, Ma 01851

29 September, 1987

Dr. Lalit S. Kanodia, President
Datamatics Consultants Ltd.
Unit No. 39 SDF II
SEEPZ
Andheri (East)
Bombay, India

Dear Dr. Kanodia:

I am writing to commend the work performed by Ravi Iyer who has been with us at Wang from the first of March 1987 till September thirtieth, 1987 successfully completing his assigned projects of Bofa SVCs, Dmstxcvt, Backup, SSLs, Roc Bam, and Roll Forward Recovery on schedule. Ravi had to write test plans and programs to complete the testing of these features. He also had time to help in the testing of Bug fixes which were 'rolled in' from prior operating systems. We greatly appreciate Ravi's help and efficiency in testing these critical components of the VS Operating System 7.20.00 project. His help will aid in releasing the Operating System on schedule.

Regards,

Howard Finn

Howard Finn
SIT Section Manager

cc: Wai Lee
Ravi Iyer
Richard Banville

Datamatics Limited

Unit No. 38/39, SDF II, SEEPZ, Andheri (E), Bombay-400 096. India.
Tel. : +91 (22) 6320511, 6324235-6-7, Telex : 011-79064 'DCSP IN' ● Fax : +91 (22) 6366368

Dated : 25th May, 1990

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Mr. R.S. Iyer was in the permanent employment of our Organisation with effect from 1st March, 1984 upto 24th May, 1990.

His last Designation was Project Leader.

He has left us on his own accord, and we wish him all the best.

For DATAMATICS LIMITED


K.J. Pai
Corporate Personnel Manager



Regd. Off. : Eucharistic Congress Bldg., No. III, 5, Convent St., Bombay-400 039. Tel. : 202 05 31 / 202 04 78

From a social point of view from 1984 to 1990, I thoroughly enjoyed myself with a group of other youngsters in Datamatics who were on the software consultancy joyride. I indulged myself in terms of partying, going out on trips, buying books and other stuff etc. which were seriously limited during my college days due to financial constraints. Perhaps I over-

indulged myself and got stuck with a cigarette smoking habit and while I was not an alcoholic, I loved to booze out quite regularly. I also explored a fair bit of the cultural scene wherever I was in India or abroad - films, music, museums. I could feed my voracious reading habit by buying paperback stuff without any concerns. I also did attend many spiritual meets to get a feel about them and also read rather deeply on scripture especially Vedanta. However I did not have Bhakti (faith in God and love for God) - I was looking at it only from a rational/intellectual point of view and missed out the emotional/Bhakti experience of God.

I think it was while I was working with Datamatics that my brother had got married. We were initially staying in our small Ganga Nivas flat in Dombivli. I think after my Brussels, Belgium trip we moved into a larger flat in a building in the same area, called Datta Prakash building, if I recall correctly. This flat was taken in some Pagri system if I recall correctly, which is somewhere between the deposit system used in Ganga Nivas building and ownership. During my stay in Brussels, my Indian salary was getting accumulated in my bank account and that was part of the money that was used to take this new flat (under Pagri system). We continued to retain the Ganga Nivas flat paying its rent even though we were not living there anymore.

I had read a lot about start-ups abroad. I was sure that Graphical User Interfaces (MS-Windows, X-Windows) were the future. I wrote a proposal about acquiring expertise in that area and then going for projects in that area. The proposal got an I-saw-it kind-of acknowledgement from a top person in Datamatics but not anything more. I got an offer from a start-

up who seemed to want a tech. guy like me to provide the tech. direction. So at around 28 years or so of age, in May and June 1990, despite great concerns expressed by family, I took a big decision of leaving well established Datamatics and joining a start-up Boshu Technics Corporation (BTC) in the same SEEPZ, Mumbai export zone. My dream was that instead of body-shopping people to USA & Europe, we will develop software development expertise in India in this sunrise area of GUI, and execute projects offshore (in India).

I had experienced Wang Labs., USA layoffs of its employees while I was on-contract there (me and colleagues from Datamatics being the cheaper alternative) and felt quite troubled by seeing such layoffs. In one particular case, a senior technical man was given the pink slip and then accompanied by a security man & the dept. head from his window office to the elevators. As the senior technical man crossed my cubicle he looked at me. I did not know what was happening - that he was getting laid off. The look was not of anger but it certainly had some discomfort and unhappiness. It affected me badly when I came to know later that he had been laid off. Perhaps as he looked at me, he blamed me for stealing his job though I was not involved in any way with his work. The young foreign Asian contract worker stealing the veteran American's job - that may have been the story line from some American perspectives!

I wanted to first do offshore development and then, the fantastic dream of creating software products in India. That would completely avoid facing these unhappy you-are-stealing-my-job looks from Americans (& Europeans).

There is an important point about me being an odd man out when I went abroad for my assignments, especially to the USA. Most of my colleagues fixed up a job in the USA by the end of their assignment and stayed back. The standard of living difference between USA and India in the 80s was huge. But for my spiritual and cultural leanings, I too may have joined most of my friends and settled down in the USA.

I did send, in gratitude, a copy of my Who am I? I am I... book to Dr. L.S. Kanodia in Datamatics sometime in end 2018 but did not hear anything back.

I think it is appropriate to mention another social aspect of Datamatics life then. The software success story in India has an interesting romantic angle! As there were quite a few girls who joined software consultancy firms, the material success and long assignments abroad where boys and girls of the same company worked with the same customer and stayed close to each other, was a perfect setting for romances to bloom! And most of these romances were inter-linguistic, sometimes inter-caste and, in some rare cases, inter-religion ones. Many of them culminated, fortunately I think, in marriage. In Datamatics these affairs, most of which, I repeat, led to marriage, had become so common that a Parsi wag and a good elder friend, claimed the company should be renamed to Date-a-mate-ics 😊! I recall a Hindu well-to-do Maharashtrian/Goan boy marrying a well-to-do (I believe) Bohra Muslim girl, while both were working in Datamatics. I am not sure but I think there was some resistance from one or both families/communities. I think the couple later settled down in the USA, not surprisingly. I mean, for Hindu-Muslim couples, USA would be a heaven from any embarrassments they would

face in India. I believe that a Hindu-Christian couple (Nair boy - Malayali Christian girl) of Datamatics, in comparison, did not have to face so much tension.

Excitement of Joining a Start-Up In a Key Position

Datamatics was my first company, which is a kind-of alma mater for me for software as I was trained by that company in it. I was with it from Mar. 1984 to May 1990. I was approached by an ex Datamatics management level person with an offer to join a small company in SEEPZ as its software head (Manager Software was the designation I eventually had). I was having all these great visions of software entrepreneurship that I had read about related to US software companies and so I was very attracted by the offer.

Boshu Technics Corp. (BTC) was started by a Mr. S.K. Basu, who was a mechanical engineer with IBM (India), rose to top positions in it, and when IBM quit India, he was made a director of the company IDM (IIRC) which was formed by IBM when it quit India,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IBM_India#Pre-liberalization_Story.

[I later was informed by some people that at some point IDM got sold to somebody else in India, HCL perhaps, and all its directors received a lot of money, including Mr. Basu. Perhaps it was with part of that money that he started the BTC company.] Mr. Basu was very gentlemanly in the meeting. He seemed to like my ideas. I decided to take the plunge. My family and friends wondered what I was doing but I was so confident of myself that they did not protest much.

I started working in the new company with great enthusiasm. I was given a very decent send off by my previous company. As we needed software developers/engineers who would be able

to explore and develop expertise in GUI, I tapped a few known people from Datamatics. Three of them joined the new company. I don't recall whether I seriously thought about the ethical aspects of tapping people from my previous company. Perhaps I did not. While I did not do anything underhand, perhaps the ethical thing for me would have been to respond only if they had approached me, instead of me approaching them. Anyway, that's how it happened. [BTW I believe Datamatics itself may have got formed similarly with its founder quitting TCS and getting a few other TCS colleagues to his new company. I guess such things are considered quite fair in the rough and tumble of the business world. But yet, today I would consider a direct approach to a previous company colleague as unethical poaching.]

I must also say that BTC had already got some 2 or 3 COBOL and Dbase/Foxpro type application programmers. As I brought in a focus of GUI, I was not able to push for the COBOL and Dbase/Foxpro programming type projects. The person who got me to BTC was acting as a consultant to it. Perhaps he had recruited these programmers but he could not get export business in this area. Eventually 2 of them parted ways – as far as I recall, I only would have informed Mr. Basu that I could not focus on COBOL and Dbase/Foxpro work and not made any suggestions about asking those 2 persons to leave. Nobody directly accused me of anything. But at lunch - I used to eat lunch with the small programming team we had; the Datamatics colleagues had not joined us yet - a junior raised the issue, IIRC, of the consultant saying something to 2 of the programmers about looking for another job. I think I just kept quiet. The 2 guys quit but I don't think they held me

responsible for having to move elsewhere. That was my first taste of the unpleasant tasks that a manager of a small company which has financial constraints, gets into.

After my previous company colleagues joined company BTC, somewhere down the line, we recruited two freshers, a girl who was B.E. (Computers) or something like that and a boy who had done M.Tech(CS) from IIT Bombay. So with the team of me, one senior techie, two mid-level techies and two juniors, we embarked on exploring and developing expertise in GUI applications. The team got divided into two groups - one to explore Microsoft Windows (then known as MS-Windows IIRC) and another to explore Motif/X-Windows. We used PC hardware with SCO-Unix for Motif/X-Windows. Somewhere down the line I had to go for a 2 month stint with an Image Processing Applications (Database oriented apps.) small NRI owned company in California (near Santa Barbara). That, in some way with Mr. Basu's contacts, developed into an order from another party, once again NRI, a Sikh, to develop an Image processing indexing application product. The product would allow users to associate images with specific text data fields, and enable fast retrieval of text data and associated image. IIRC, it was generic allowing users to define what sort of text data fields they would like to associate with their images. This software was to be developed on MS-Windows. That was one team. Another team worked on an in-house Executive Information System which would give graphical views of management information. This was on the Motif/X-Windows platform.

Over time both teams developed expertise and the software was in somewhat decent shape. Of course, there was a lot of

development challenges and pain. I learned how fresh graduates and post-graduates in Computer Science & Engineering from India could be really raw in programming – even though both the freshers were from good colleges/institutions. But they learned fast. Over time, we had achieved capability and could demonstrate that capability to potential customers. Now I thought the script would be that customers would get attracted to us by our expertise which we could prove! And the focus was to first get software development/consultancy business - move to products big-time later on, once the software consultancy business brings in enough money. Yes, we would need some marketing. But I thought that Mr. Basu and his business contacts need to just make a few calls, a few visits and that's it – we would have enough business.

How foolish I was! My naiveté about perhaps the most vital aspect of a business, namely marketing, got viciously exposed. The owner, Mr. Basu, was a hardware man. His expertise was paper as used in paper punch cards. He did not know much about software. Neither did he have strong contacts in the software development business in USA or Europe. He did use his contacts to get some business (including the Image processing indexing application mentioned above). But it was nowhere near the marketing capability that my previous company, Datamatics, had. In Datamatics, with the expertise we had developed, I think the top man would have got fantastic business leads. After all GUI was taking off in a huge way at that time (early 90s).

But I also saw the speed with which US companies were advertising products similar to and then superior to our Image

processing indexing application product in Image Processing applications trade magazine(s). I visited Cebit, Hannover, Germany, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CeBIT>, “the world's largest and most international computer expo” and was blown away by the huge variety of software and hardware products there, including image processing indexing products. I tasted the sharp edge of US software product company competition and realized that competing with them, with our small setup and so far away from the Image processing marketplace and action, was going to be very, very tough. [Then, of course, we did not have the easy and cheap Internet based interaction facilities that we have now.] But I felt we still were very good for software development/consultancy business related to GUI application development.

As I was not an investor, just an employee, I could only suggest attracting strong marketing chaps who could bring business from their business contacts, from other software export companies by offering them stock options – BTC could not pay the great salaries they were getting in their companies. But my suggestions fell on deaf ears. Slowly I started learning about the human aspects of top business management especially in small companies. The company was a proprietorship company. I felt that the owner wanted it to be a family run company with an expectation that his children would get involved with the company down the line! Direct control over the company was vital. The idea of giving stock options to employees, like in some US startups, would have been seen by the owner as very foolish!

Another point was about money. I learned that in the software export business, you need to be able to think in Dollars and not

Rupees. You need to be able to fly abroad regularly to the marketplace and scour around for business, and also have a full time resident marketing man abroad (in the target country/marketplace). All that meant lot of expense. If you were trying to run an export business show on a small budget, and if you did not have assured business then it was tough to survive in the field.

I saw failure looming large in front of me! All the effort I had put in, including the pressures involved in handling a fledgeling company took a heavy toll on my health. Even before leaving Datamatics, I had started having some health problems related to poor digestion probably due to some family history, some habits of mine and some project related stress there. But the order of magnitude more stress of managing a start-up wrecked my digestive system.

I could have easily quit and joined another company. But then I would be ditching the friends who I attracted to the company, and also the juniors I recruited. I felt that they all looked up to me as the key guy in the company. How could I ditch them?

On the family front too I had stress. I had asked for company accommodation as I wanted to avoid traveling from Dombivli to SEEPZ. I was given a small but comfortable flat in a large housing society called Takshila in Andheri (E), Mahakali Caves Road. SEEPZ was quite close by Auto. [BTW I don't know how to drive a bicycle or a motorbike! But I was very comfy driving automatic gear cars in USA. I could not afford to buy a car in India. So auto was the preferred mode of transport.] Some days I could even go walking to office by shortcut (maybe 20 to 30 minutes). I was glad to have got

relieved of the commute problem. My mother was staying with me and was comfortable staying with me. Slowly I realized that she is aging and that I need to factor that into my life. But in the Andheri (E) residential area I did not know anybody. My support system in terms of family and family friends was in Dombivli and the central side of Bombay.

The worries I had then were: If mother falls ill how do I balance taking care of her and work? Do I now have to seriously consider marriage? BTW I was around 28 when I joined BTC.

Somehow I was not sure whether I wanted to or was ready to marry and settle down - neither had I felt that I had met a girl who I fell headlong in love with and wanted to marry, and who would have been interested in marrying me!. While I was with Datamatics, my family (mother, brother, his wife and later child) was still slowly finding our financial feet and stabilizing. I came across many nice girls in Datamatics and in my social circle outside Datamatics too. But most of these persons were based in Bombay whereas I was in 'far-away' Dombivli with a big commute involved. So I think I had an underlying feeling that financially I was, as of then, below the social and economic level of some of the nice girls I had met. And then there was the big issue of settling in wealthy foreign countries, the main one being the USA. I was very appreciative of the good material life in the USA and in Western Europe which I had experienced during my assignment stints there. But I had a strong attachment to Hindu and Indian culture and spirituality (even though I was not into Bhakti/devotion then but was more of an Upanishads/Vedanta and Bhagavad Gita man) for which I thought India is the best place for me to

continue to be based in. Most of the nice girls in Datamatics and other software companies I knew were interested in settling in USA and other wealthy foreign countries!

And then there was this underlying desire in me to pursue spiritual sadhana like I had read that Hindu spiritual masters had done e.g. Ramana Maharishi. It was more of a sub-conscious desire and not something that I seriously considered in my planning at that time. But I think that sub-conscious desire led me to keep postponing any marriage possibility. In this context, I should also mention how my reading of a major event in Somerset Maugham's novel, *The Moon and Sixpence*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Moon_and_Sixpence, impacted me. In the novel, the main character, Charles Strickland, abandons his wife and children, and his white collar (banking/stockbroking) career, to pursue his passion of painting. What horrified me was that I was able to empathize to some extent with Charles Strickland losing interest in family life and white collar career, and giving it all up. I also felt that Strickland (character) was a horrible fellow to have abandoned his wife & children. But the latter feeling could not remove fully some empathy that I had for him.

Of course, the gigantic spiritual figure of Gautam Buddha also comes to mind, in this regard. He essentially abandoned his wife and small child, and became a renunciate. However, in those days (late 20s and early 30s of my life), Buddha was just too reverential a figure for me to make a frank analysis of this event in his life as compared to Charles Strickland, a fictional character (who seems to have been based in part on a real person as per the above mentioned wiki page). But the reality of this event of Buddha's life, whose destiny seemed to have

marked him to be a great spiritual master benefiting millions of people over centuries and millennia, was well known in my educated middle class Indian milieu. My view of it then, I think, was that Buddha's pull towards spiritual pursuits was just too strong to hold him in family life.

Perhaps it was my sub-conscious but deep desire to engage in dedicated spiritual effort as a single spiritual aspirant (sadhaka) that made me hesitate to commit to married life which would have typically meant that I could not engage in such dedicated spiritual effort till I and wife had raised children and the children were settled in life. That's usually a minimum of a 30 year period in my educated middle class Indian milieu. I think that minimum 30 year commitment to family life after marriage was something that I just was not comfortable with. Of course, married Hindu couples also could pursue spirituality along with raising their family. But while raising the family, neither the husband nor the wife could do something like what Ramana Maharishi did during his sadhana days.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramana_Maharshi#Adolescence_and_realization_\(1895%E2%80%931896\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramana_Maharshi#Adolescence_and_realization_(1895%E2%80%931896)) tells us that when Ramana arrived in Tiruvannamalai in 1896-97, he spent days in samadhi in the Patala lingam vault.

For my personal family situation now, it was becoming a more practical issue of marriage so that mother can take a back seat about cooking, caring for the home etc. and also be given necessary care when needed. Essentially, I felt that I had to forget about my single spiritual sadhaka desires and follow most of the people of my age and above that I knew and whose friendship and love I cherished, by getting into married life and

pursuing my spiritual interests and desires within the limits of married life.

I started exploring the marriage possibility. I have to confess that I could not handle well the first rejection that I encountered from a lady friend. I think it was a combination of rank immaturity in handling such delicate matters with ladies, the stress I was going through, and my inability to handle the lack of response for quite some time (which was, essentially, a clear indication of rejection). I behaved in a foolish manner and got into some ranting and raving about it with a few men friends. My behavior then was terrible and rather pathetic. It was not gentlemanly at all.

But now I have also learned to use the wonderful spiritual balm of praying to God and seeking forgiveness from those whom I may have hurt (asking them in my mind if I cannot directly ask them) by such foolishness of mine, and moving on. So that's over and done with for me. I have the luxury now to look back on the foolish mind-body complex of Ravi S. Iyer then and even laugh at that foolishness ☺. But I felt it appropriate to mention it in this book as I think it may be helpful to some young readers to avoid the foolish behavior that I had got into then, and also as a more complete chronicling of my life.

I then started exploring other possibilities, with arranged marriage possibility being the main one. Many of the software developer girls/ladies of my age or slightly lesser age that I knew in my software industry career and who I may have been interested in marrying (if they were interested), were either

already married or abroad. My social circle in Andheri (E), a new area for me, was very limited.

I made a small write-up about me, my interests and my outlook on life, which included mention of my health issues, and provided that along with my pics, of course, to the matchmaker in our Tamil Brahmin community (not a professional but an elderly gentleman who was doing the work as a social service). I recall that the matchmaker appreciated the write-up!

In the next few months, there was some action on this front. But things did not work out. In some proposal case(s), the disinterest was from my side and in some other case(s), the disinterest was from the other side.

In one particular case, the lady concerned and her family visited my flat. I had insisted on a separate meeting outside the flat with the lady which they agreed to. So I took her to a restaurant near Andheri(E) railway station, while her other family members were at my flat with my mother and perhaps others in my family. We had a chat in the restaurant (one which was not too crowded and allowed for such discussions without others overhearing it). The lady was a nice person. If I recall correctly, she was a school teacher. I recall that she had come to my (rented) flat along with her mother and a brother/cousin brother. I am not sure but I think that like in my case, her father too may have passed away earlier. We came back to my flat, perhaps in an hour or so. I thanked them and they left. I was not sure whether I should go ahead.

I later indicated to my family that I am not keen on the proposal. That got communicated to them. If I recall correctly,

they persisted a little as they seemed to be very keen on the proposal. Eventually they moved on.

As I look back, I realize that perhaps the lady concerned was not exposed to such meetings with prospective grooms. I mean this was early 1990s Bombay and my Tamil Brahmin community in Bombay was still quite conservative in such matters. Perhaps like I was not able to handle rejection from the lady I had corresponded with (mentioned earlier), this lady too may have got emotionally upset at the rejection. Perhaps that is why in our community then, such individual meeting between boy and girl outside the house/flat, was very uncommon. In fact, in another proposal case, the family was not willing to accept my demand that I meet the girl outside the house/flat. They said that I can speak to her in a room in the house/flat. But I insisted that I should be able to take her outside somewhere as I felt that that's where she and I could speak freely. The father refused (it was a phone conversation, if I recall correctly – landline phone as mobiles were not around then) and I was not willing to budge, and so that proposal fell through. The father even tried to explain to me about how these things can be emotionally sensitive. But I was too influenced by Western style life including some Western type life in Bombay and my software industry culture where men and women worked side-by-side, to understand that.

Mainly for my own sake as the probability of the ladies reading this book is low, I would like to take this opportunity to apologize and seek forgiveness from the ladies for any emotional hurt that I may caused to them (including the lady mentioned earlier that I had taken to a restaurant).

One thing became clear that I was a less attractive marriage prospect since my company was an unknown startup company. If I had instead been with Datamatics or some other well known software company, the girl's side would have had more confidence about my financial and career prospects!

As I was going through this process, I realized that I am too unstable work-wise and health-wise to consider marriage. I also saw how complicated the match-making process is. I thought - let me settle some issues first before getting into marriage. Eventually my digestive system became very weak. I lost a lot of weight. Visiting doctors - allopathic and Ayurvedic - was only giving temporary relief. I had to kick my habits of occasional drinking (which was not too difficult to get rid of) and smoking (that was tough). Diet restrictions came into play. Yet my digestive system did not recover properly. When I visited my previous company, Datamatics, around that time, Dr L.S. Kanodia, the top man there looked at my thin body and remarked, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown'. Of course, I had read that line many times before. But it coming from the top man of Datamatics and being so true, hit me real hard. I don't blame him. He just said the truth - it was the truth that hit me hard.

I tried Yoga, meditation and all that. It helped but only to some extent. I also got dragged into some personal matter in the office. The personal matter was a brutal additional blow for my stress and my poor digestion. I was a completely beaten man. Never before in my life had I failed so completely! Business wise we had the knowledge and expertise but lacked marketing and so did not have great business. Health wise I was messed up. The stories of software entrepreneurial success in USA

seemed to be running to a very different script than that of mine/ours. I decided that I had no option but to quit, take a break and focus on regaining my health and settling down to a less stressful job.

So after a period of around two and a half years with BTC, in Nov. 1992, at around 30 years of age, I quit BTC. I was given a very nice send off again. We maintained good relations later on too. Mr. Basu was a good man though not knowledgeable about software development for export business. He tried to diversify into domestic market using the Image processing indexing application product we had developed and perhaps had some success in the local market. He moved the office out of SEEPZ to a place near SEEPZ (lack of export was resulting in pressure from SEEPZ authorities to give up the allotted unit), and, IIRC, got out of the export market.

Mr. Basu as an investor and a person from the Indian computer industry (more into hardware and sales of computers) had created a company which hired significant number of people, including youngsters. This company provided a launching pad for the careers of at least two fresh software developers (recruited by me) who got exposed to Graphical User Interface (GUI) applications development which was very new technology at that time. It also seems to have contributed to growing the technical expertise of the three well experienced Datamatics colleagues of mine who I had attracted to join BTC. I later (late 2000s and in 2010s) got re-connected (mainly via Internet) with these three ex Datamatics colleagues of mine. All of them flourished in their careers later on. Besides software developers, there were a few administrative staff too for whom BTC provided a livelihood. This

contribution that Mr. S.K. Basu made as an entrepreneur and an investor at a somewhat advanced age - I think he would have been in his late 50s or early 60s when I joined BTC - to the career and livelihood of the Indians who worked in his company, is an important one. I thank Late Mr. S.K. Basu for this entrepreneurial and investment contribution of his.

Mr Basu passed away. I don't recall the year - it was before September 2002. I was informed about it and visited his house at Khar Road/SantaCruz. They were a good family who had seen a lot of life. Mr. Basu had studied Mechanical Engg. in Glasgow, UK, I believe. His family had lived in Dacca (now in Bangladesh) during India-Pakistan partition days (1947) and seen the horrors of partition. Mr. Basu shared many of his experiences in life with me. I did learn quite a bit about human aspects of life and business from him. He was an elegant man and it was a privilege for me to have known him.

[A view was put forward that running a company did not suit me.] My response: Well, I would say that I expected the top man to handle the marketing bit and my failure was in not properly assessing the top man's marketing skills and contacts for the software consultancy export business. I think I did a reasonable job of my role of "Software Development Manager". I was not expected to play the marketing role. The top man who was expected to play the marketing role could not deliver orders.

So I tend to disagree with the view that running a company did not suit me. Many software and other entrepreneurs in the USA had failed in their initial enterprises, learned their lessons, and moved on to found/co-found and run successful

companies. In my case, I am quite sure, I would have licked my stress wounds and healed them over some time, and then could have rejoined the software consultancy export management/business fray a wiser man and succeeded. In fact, quite a few companies in SEEPZ, including my first company, Datamatics, would have welcomed me with open arms. A lot of other businesses, including a flourishing financial firm started by a family friend, who wanted to move into software were keen on hiring me to start their software consultancy business effort!

But destiny had other things in store for me. I deeply analyzed my goals in life and felt deep inside that running a software company was not really my destiny/my calling. I turned my enthusiasm to exploring spirituality and my cultural roots, and looked upon my software development/engineering profession as just a means to support me but not as my main goal in life.

I am grateful to many Boshu Technics Corporation (BTC) friends and colleagues for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any BTC friend who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Late Mr. S.K. Basu for the love and guidance I received from him.

I tried to contact one of Mr. S.K. Basu's sons so that I could send him my Who am I? I am I ... book, but the contact attempt did not go through.

Given below are compressed pics of my Boshu Technics (BTC) work related USA and South Korean visas. I have also provided a pic of my California, USA driving license with me being around 28 yrs old when the license pic was taken. Larger version of these pics and other related pics can be seen in these two posts:

- 1) Some old pics of me (Ravi S. Iyer),
<https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/some-old-pics-of-me.html>, 25th Dec. 2018
- 2) Documenting my part auto bio with pics - the Visa trail as documentation of my foreign trips,
<https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics.html>, 26th Dec. 2018

U.S. IMMIGRATION
15 08 C-13580

AUG 30 1990

EO

(CLASS)

ST/ VISAS

No 316142

THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA
NONIMMIGRANT VISA
ISSUED AT

BOMBAY

B-1/B-2 23 AUG 1990

CLASSIFICATION / DATE ISSUED

22 FEB 1991

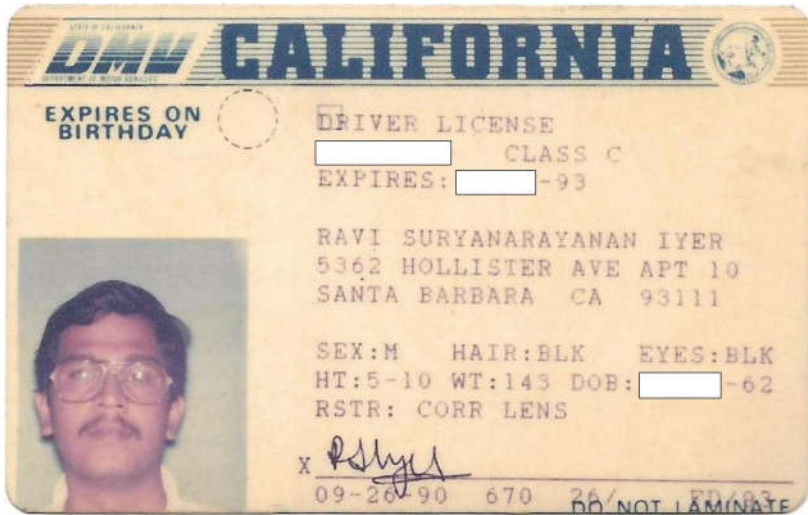
BEARER(S)

Allen J. Kepchar

CONSULAR OFFICER 1052

33





Given below is a compressed pic of an appreciation letter from one German customer of BTC for whom we had done a project and where I had played a project leader role. That is followed by a compressed pic of the BTC experience letter.

Larger pics of these letters and other letters can be viewed here: Documenting my part auto bio with pics - computer software industry appreciation and experience letters, https://ravisier.blogspot.com/2018/12/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics_27.html, 27th Dec. 2018

Gesellschaft für Betriebswirtschaft und Systementwicklung m.b.H.

BUSY

BUSY G.m.b.H. - Virchowstraße 19 - D-5000 Köln 41

Boshu Technics Corporation
Mr. Basu
110 SDF IV, SEEPZ
Bombay 400 096
India

Telefax: 0091-22-6378329

BUSY
Gesellschaft für
Betriebswirtschaft und
Systementwicklung
m.b.H.

Virchowstraße 19
D-5000 Köln 41
Telefon 0221/43 38 36
oder 4 30 23 24

Datum:
August 13, 1991

Dear Mr. Basu,

now that our project has come to an end, I want to thank you very much for your work, which gave much satisfaction to us.

Working on a big commercial application project our demand on you was to develop a

"Filter-program for converting COBOL-85-Sources with embedded VAX/Rdb-Statements to UNIX/INFORMIX".

You did this job on the basis of a rough specification in a very professional manner; special thanks to your project leader Mr. Ravi Iyer.

Even though we had to recognize during the development of the detailed technical concept that your job was considerably more complex than expected, we were provided with the results of your work according to costs and schedule.

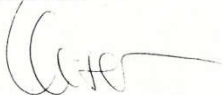
The fact that we are able to work on our conversion project with the first corrected version of your filter without any problems argues in favour of your work, too.

Smaller modifications of your C-sources have been possible without difficulties because of the clearly arranged way in which your programming was done (conventions were specified by mutual agreement).

Dear Mr. Basu, on the basis of this positive experience in our cooperation I would be glad if there would be another occasion for a joint project in the near future.

Yours sincerely

- BUSY GmbH -



(K. Kaiser)

Copy: Mr. Sircar

Commerzbank
BLZ 370 400 44
Konto-Nr. 2 333 912
Geschäftsführer:
Harald Hoffmeister
Dipl. Kfm. Klaus Kaiser
Amtsgericht Köln
HRB 14 963



August 28, 2002

Boshu Technics Corporation
Shrenik House
F-14, MIDC Road No. 23
Opp. SEEPZ, Andheri (East)
Mumbai - 400 093, INDIA
Telephone : (91)-(22)-8370824
Telefax : (91)-(22)-8378329
E-Mail : office@boshu.com
Web Site : http://www.boshu.com

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Mr. Ravi Iyer was in our employment from 1-June-1990 to 16-Nov-1992. At the time of leaving, his designation was Manager Software.

Mr. Iyer is leaving us of his own accord for better prospects. We wish him a successful professional career.

For Boshu Technics Corporation

**Mr. N.D. Ganguly
Officer - Administration**

Member of



2, Cynithia, Main Avenue, Santacruz (West), Mumbai 400 054. Telephone: +91-22-6498804/646 3825

The Turn to the Spiritual

Disclosure: From now on, there will usually be a mix of software, personal/family life and spiritual stuff. Please feel free to ignore some stuff. Especially the spiritual stuff - it is certainly not an evangelical pitch about Hinduism or Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It is just an account of some periods of my life from my point of view. Hinduism and Sathya Sai Baba figure in it rather prominently. Feel free to doubt/disbelieve stuff that I write about Hinduism and Sri Sathya Sai Baba :). Of course, from my personal perspective, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is my revered and beloved Gurudev to whom I am deeply grateful for all the direct and indirect spiritual guidance he provided me.

Sometime in Nov. 92 I parted ways with Boshu Technics Corporation (BTC). I decided to take a few months off to review my situation, my life's goals, focus on my health etc. I moved from the company-rented apartment in Takshila, Andheri (E) to another flat in the same large society on rent. It was mother and I in the flat like in the company flat earlier. Even before I quit BTC, I had made a lot of efforts to analyze my health problems. Even the doctors were mentioning that stress could be an important factor. So I started analyzing my life for stress. I went for Yoga classes, ensured that I did not work on weekends, did lot of alternate topics reading (Time and Newsweek were favourite world news magazines of mine then). Yoga was interesting - I attended a course on it held in a Christian ashram in Andheri (E) and was taught by a Christian brother/priest! IIRC he was Telugu. He taught well, especially the mental aspect. The Shavasana (corpse) pose was wonderful

for me - so completely relaxing! Pranayama and breath control were a revelation. I spoke to him about his wonderful teaching of Yoga and how he blended Hindu OM Shanti Shanti Shanti (or something like that) in his Yoga teachings. Next day, the chant was changed to Shalom, Shalom, Shalom! I recall the brother was kind enough to visit me and mother in my flat and sing for us (of his own volition). Wow! It was so pleasing, so enchanting. I think he sang in Telugu - I did not understand the words as I did not know Telugu then.

Yoga was wonderful for my stress problem. But not when I was working. Yoga had taught me to watch my body. I could even feel blood being pumped from my heart throughout the body and getting kind-of pulled back in the pulsating motion the heart has. It was an extraordinary experience for me - never before had I felt this aspect of my body! But as I would walk into SEEPZ for work at BTC, I would feel my stomach muscles tense, and I could do nothing about it! Yoga was of no use to prevent my stomach muscles from tensing up. I did some analysis. I realized that it was the expectations that were heaped on me which was stressing me. When I had taken up the BTC offer I had foolishly thought that if things don't work out I can just quit. I did not realize that I would get emotionally involved with BTC. I had attracted three of my Datamatics colleagues and friends to BTC, then recruited two freshers. Somehow I now felt responsible for them. I felt it was my duty to do my level best for the enterprise to succeed so that all will be happy. Net effect was that I could not quit easily. I had got emotionally entangled and was not able to play a heartless professional role.

In hindsight I realize now that instead of bottling up all the tension of the company within me, I should have discussed it with the entire team openly. That would have given me some stress relief. Maybe that would have resulted in guys leaving the company and maybe I too would have left earlier. But the problem of bottled stress impacting my health would have got controlled. Neither did I have a wife with whom I could discuss the matter. Most of my other industry friends had chosen to settle in the West [USA, Europe & Australia]. So there were no close friends outside of BTC to discuss the matter with. And then there was fear of earning a reputation for failure. Once again I did not realize this aspect when I did my initial analysis of joining BTC. My temperament was not tough enough then to be able to take a failure reputation hit. As a businessman you need to know when to cut your losses and start afresh. In fact, I did not even realize how these failures get talked about and how they can affect you, if you are not tough enough to handle it. Anyway, my stress could not get controlled in BTC, and so I had to resign on health grounds.

Initially I just wanted to unwind after moving into the new rented flat. In a short time, Babri Masjid demolition happened (Dec. 6, 1992),

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demolition_of_Babri_Masjid.

Mumbai started going through some chaos. Jogeshwari(E) just behind our Andheri (E) building society (Takshila) area had some Muslim people. IIRC, some tragic incidents occurred there (either in 92 or later, I don't recall clearly). Not the best way for me to unwind my stress.

And then a very close relative was faced with a very challenging health situation while she was around 40 years of

age with a young school going son. The days after that were some of the roughest days of my life. I had seen fair bit of serious health challenges among the elders in the family. But I had not seen somebody around 40 in our family who was being threatened by such serious challenges. And who had a school going son!

As I was not working for a regular job then I spent a lot of time with the close relative (and so did my mother). I clearly recall wondering about serious and big questions about life. We felt so helpless against this challenge. Our family had been dealt a body-blow. My BTC company problems of the past were insignificant in comparison to what the family had to now confront.

The BTC company startup failure stress messing up my health and then this close relative having to face serious health challenges really shook me up and, in hindsight, I think, was one of the turning points of my life. The odd thing about life is that challenges make you dig deep within yourself and fight to overcome. We all overcame the initial shock of knowing about the serious health challenges of the lady. The lady, who was a medical doctor herself, dug deep, took advice from her doctor friends in India and abroad about how to combat the challenge. She took herbal kind-of additional remedies besides the Allopathic drugs, tried very hard to change her mental attitude to stop worrying and go with the flow. And she overcame the health challenges over the years! What a triumph it was for all of us!

These events made me seriously examine my life. Right from my early boyhood, I had a deep interest in Upanishads and

spirituality in general but not orthodox religious practice even though I participated in the Brahmin rituals of my immediate and extended family. After my B.Sc. days, I had kept my deep spiritual interest aside as I had to first focus on solving my money problems.

Now I was just above 30 and felt that I should take up a relatively stress-free job and, at the same time, explore spirituality. The key failure in the BTC startup, IMHO, was the inability of Mr. Basu or his friends, or me even if I was not expected to be the marketing guy, to bring enough and good GUI software development business. I had learned the importance of marketing. I decided to get exposure to marketing myself but without too much stress. Another point was that I had spent almost the whole of my career in the software export business. SEEPZ seemed to be another world from the real Bombay outside. I felt I needed to get exposed to the software scene in the real Bombay as against the 'outside India' SEEPZ world.

I analyzed that I got stressed when I have to lie. Exaggerating company's capabilities (lying to put it bluntly), hiding its weaknesses and over-committing seemed to be quite common in marketing departments of many Indian export-oriented software consultancy companies. But marketing does not necessarily involve lying. I had read marketing tomes (Kotler and others) and the essence seemed to be quite simple to me. Identify the needs of customers/market and offer that need at a suitable price.

I decided to become a freelance software consultant/trainer. From around March 1993 to October 1993 I explored local

software business as an independent consultant. I did a few 'Windows programming with C++' training courses for corporate customers of a company called Akshay. I knew one of its directors, a Mr. V, quite well as he was ex-Datamatics, one of the previous companies I had worked for. Mr. V. was an IIT & IIM (Indian Institute of Management, a premier set of management education institutions in India) combo qualified guy; perhaps the hottest educational qualifications for software consultants in India then as the business was more in the business applications area as against system software kind. The customers of my training sessions were banks like ANZ Grindlays, Union Bank of India etc. as well as mixed sessions involving participants from various companies like Larsen & Toubro and others whose names I cannot clearly recall now. They were quite appreciative of my teaching. It was a happy experience without much mental stress. But it did involve physical stress of handling full day classes. I was experiencing such almost-whole-day-talking physical stress perhaps for the first time in my career. Given my digestion problems it was a little tricky but I managed without any serious issues.

I checked out some other local non-export software setups. I found that there is a huge difference between local software business and export software business. Most software developers wanted to get into software export work and fly abroad. The guys employed with the small local software companies doing domestic work were usually the guys who could not get software export jobs – I am sure there would be some exceptions – I am talking about the general case in *small* local software companies. And the work was more Foxpro,

Dbase etc. GUI and C++ was just too advanced for the domestic market then.

I also learned some lessons about being an entrepreneur. At BTC, even if I played an important role in the startup, I was an employee getting a salary. Now I was absolutely on my own. I had to raise invoices, learn about tax matters, file returns etc. I even looked around for a small office but decided not to go for it. I thought of using BSNL (or what it was called then, maybe MTNL) voice mailbox services and went to visit BSNL's PRO in Prabhadevi in Mumbai, IIRC. On the way to the BSNL PRO office I heard a large sound with alarmed birds flying away and making quite a racket. I did not pay much attention to it and went to the BSNL PRO office. While in that office I came to know of chain/serial bomb blasts going on in Mumbai - Air India building, Bombay Stock Exchange (the March 1993 Bombay blasts,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993_Bombay_bombings) ... The atmosphere in the BSNL office was one of utter bewilderment.

I made my way outside the BSNL building and went to the bus stand to get a bus to Andheri. I recall I got a bus - everybody including the conductor was in some sort of panic. The bus went by a side street towards Mahim bus depot. As we neared the bus depot we saw some youngsters going around in a gang and throwing stones. Some stones hit the bus too. The bus was waved into Mahim bus depot. Ah! We were in a safe place, now. But nobody knew what to do. I walked into one of the bus stand buildings and found a place to rest - perhaps it was the resting place for drivers and conductors. After some time I was asked whether I was staff and as I was not, was asked to vacate the place.

I went outside Mahim bus depot. There were some policemen outside. I was looking on the scene and perhaps my stance and dress (white collar office dress) caught the attention of a foreigner who was in a car, probably headed to the airport, who was looking really dazed and hassled. The car was part of the traffic halted by a traffic policeman. The foreigner and I had eye-contact for some time - I still remember his look vaguely. It seemed as if he thought full-scale riots would break out anytime and he needs to make his getaway. We could hear gunshots IIRC - later it turned out that there was firing in/near the fisherman colony behind the nearby Mahim causeway. After quite some time of trying to thumb a lift, a couple in a car was kind enough to give me one. The man made a sensational statement about a very important place in Dadar being severely damaged (gone was what he said, IIRC) but which turned out to be a wild rumour, a baseless exaggeration! Anyway, they dropped me off in Andheri (W) somewhere with me thanking them profusely. I could make it from there to my rented flat in Andheri (E) without much trouble, IIRC. My mother was in the flat unaware of all that was happening in the city.

Some more details of my experience of that day is provided in this blog post: My memories of the 1993 Bombay/Mumbai serial bomb blasts,

<http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2015/07/my-memories-of-1993-bombaymumbai-serial.html>, 16th July 2015

Over a few months I realized that me and mother staying alone in Andheri away from my brother and family, and our family friends' base in Dombivli, was not good anymore. My mother was slowly moving to a phase where she needed to be taken

care of. As I had written earlier I had realized that things were just too fluid for me to consider marriage then.

Around this time I also started seriously exploring the Bhakti (devotion) path. Prior to my stress and other problems, I had kind-of looked down upon the Bhakti path where one seeks succour and support from the Lord. I was into 'Jnana' - knowledge path and discussing Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. But the hammering that life had given me made me swallow my pride. I started going to temples as a humble petitioner for peace and happiness from the Lord. I had had enough ... I was ready to try bowing my head before the temple deities to get peace and happiness, and also solutions to my material problems. The act of genuinely and humbly bowing/surrendering one's problems to the Lord had a tremendous effect of relieving me! I was quite astonished to see such an effect on my body and mind complex by the simple act of genuine and humble prayer to the Lord for help and support. I felt that there is something to this prayer stuff and that the Bhakti/devotional traditions of my forefathers and religion have some real value. Otherwise, people would not be following these traditions for so long. I got deeper into the Bhakti tradition. Instead of Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, I started focusing on Srimad Bhagavatham which has the miraculous accounts of Krishna's life and how he saved his devotees from their difficulties and solved their problems, and other Avatars (excluding Rama Avatar IIRC which is in the Ramayana). Of course, I had read abridged accounts of Bhagavatham and Ramayana earlier but I thought them to be mythical accounts i.e. I had quite some doubt about whether they were factual accounts. In other words, I had read abridged

accounts of these texts earlier but without faith. This time around I started reading more elaborate and authoritative versions of these texts and, very importantly, reading them with faith. And Oh, what a difference that faith made to the experience of reading these devotional texts!

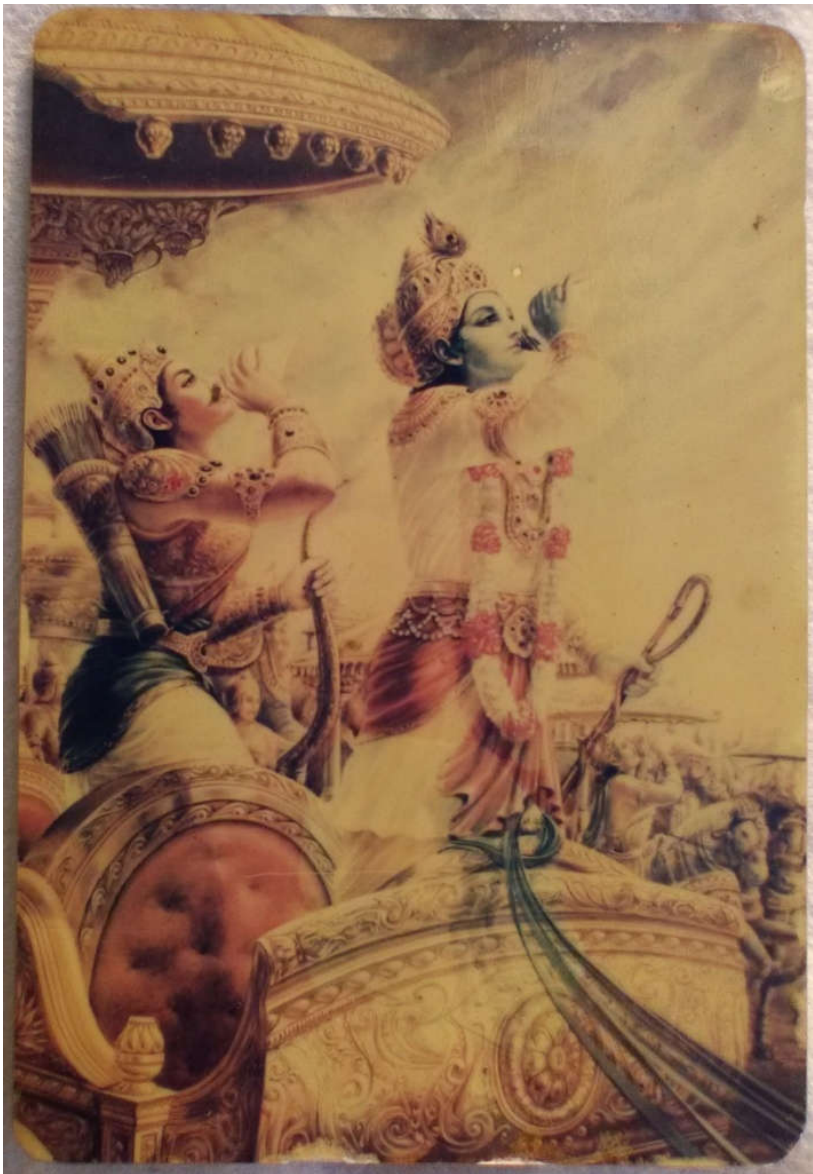
I started visiting Juhu ISKCON temple regularly. The bhajans at the temple were enchanting. It was a happy place to be in. And then I could go out to Juhu beach and enjoy watching the waves and the people. My life had changed quite a bit. The stressful days of BTC had been quite forgotten. Ayurvedic treatment, change of lifestyle, Bhakti, less stress etc. had some positive effects on my health. I was able to make a name for myself as a software consultant in the local software market, though it was more of training and small amount of software development consultancy. Money was not great but there was something to keep the home fires burning.

I think I got the Krishna blowing conch (before Mahabharata war) framed picture shown below (compressed version) from ISKCON Juhu center but I am not sure. I also think I got this picture while I was living in Andheri, Mumbai (Takshila society) before moving back to Dombivli. I kept this picture on my home work table, prayed to it quite regularly and got inspired by it.

Larger version of this pic and other related pics can be seen in this post:

Documenting my part auto bio with pics of Devas (Divine beings/gods) that I would (and continue to) pray to,

<https://ravisier.blogspot.com/2019/04/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics.html>, 3rd April 2019



This Krishna framed pic is a small one - around 3.25 inches width and around 5 inches height.

I still (in April 2019) have this photo with me in my small Puttaparthi flat.

I got deeper into spirituality and meditation. One day after seeing me meditating for long at home, my mother asked me flatly and very seriously, "Are you going to be a Sannyasi (renunciate/monk)?" That shook me up. I realized that I am getting into trouble by going so deeply into spirituality on my own, without a proper Guru. It is affecting my family i.e. my mother. I decided that I should get deeper into spirituality only with guidance from some expert in the field, i.e. a Guru.

I explored ISKCON a little deeper but I found that I was not able to reconcile to its doctrinal views. They seemed to be somewhat different from my understanding of Advaita, Vedanta, Bhagavad Gita etc. I think that my understanding of these topics are deeply influenced directly or indirectly by Adi Shankara. Adi Shankara, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adi_Shankara, is a very revered ancient spiritual scholar and spiritual master for my Kerala Iyer community in general (including me, for sure). We are also Shaivites, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shivism>, whereas the ISKCON tradition is a Vaishnavite tradition, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaishnavism>. Perhaps that is why I had some issues in relating to ISKCON's doctrinal views.

Please note that I am very respectful of ISKCON. I am also deeply grateful to ISKCON Juhu temple for the spiritual inspiration I received from it and from the books they sold

there, for my pursuit of the Bhakti path. I continue to now benefit from ISKCON devotional work through watching ISKCON videos on youtube which I typically find to be full of devotion and inspirational. It is just that for my mindset which is heavily influenced by Adi Shankara Advaita, ISKCON's doctrinal views are something that I am not in a position to fully accept/understand. But I am sure there are very large number of ISKCON devotees worldwide who fully accept and are very comfortable with those doctrinal views of ISKCON. I wish them all the very best. Hari Bol!

I don't recall exactly when this happened but it would have been sometime in the second half of 1993. One day while living in Takshila, Andheri (E), I happened to go on a walk (I love walking and have indulged myself with long walks wherever I have lived & worked – in India and abroad). I came across a spiritual centre, Dharmakshetra, and entered it. The centre had a building with a large hall having photos of Shirdi Sai Baba and somebody else who I did not really know much about - Sathya Sai Baba. There were sayings put up on framed posters/boards on the wall. Some of them struck a deep chord in me. I don't recall the exact sayings now. IIRC one was about relation of speed of breath to control of mind or was it relation of speed of breath to longevity? Slower and more controlled the breath, the better. I was quite impressed as it jelled with what I had read elsewhere and experienced in terms of connection between control of breath and control of mind.

I went to the bookstall in the complex. I think I was suggested the book, Man of Miracles by Howard Murphet (on Sathya Sai Baba) perhaps by the person handling the small bookstall. I read that book and was astonished. I did not know whether to

really believe it or not. It was just too fantastic. Yes, I had read about such things in scripture and in spiritual books about Himalayan yogis who live in caves etc. But this was about somebody who was living in the current times, among many of his devotees and in the open (as against a Himalayan recluse in a cave), and could do amazing miracles.

But then the standard teaching by Hindu masters has been to be wary of miracles and miracle men. The miracle men are supposed to have siddhis – paranormal powers by which they perform miracles. The real holy man is known by his teaching and his enlightened state ... But while all this was going through me, I was still quite curious about this miracle stuff. Then I looked around for books on his teachings and his view on Hindu scripture like Gita and Upanishads. I found such books but with a different style of writing from that of scholars. The format of verse, transliteration, translation and then commentary/interpretation was not followed. Instead it was like an essay on a topic of scripture with some references to key verses. But the writing was very meaningful and seemed to have a ring of authority. Given the rather large amount of scholarly literature (by spiritual scholars different from academic scholars) I had read on Gita, Upanishads and Advaita in general, I was quite impressed by what I read of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's writings on them.

Somewhere down the line, I think in 1993 itself, I made one of the best decisions of my life to return back to Dombivli from Andheri (E). I had slowed down the pace of my life, was an independent software consultant, had recovered my health somewhat, and had got onto the Bhakti bandwagon. I was getting back to my traditional religious roots and so moving

back to Dombivli with its more conservative, lower middle class milieu with lots of Hindu temples and religious activities, besides having many family friends, and my brother's family made lot of sense. Yes, it added a lot of commute time and commute discomfort but that now seemed minor discomfort considering the other advantages gained (whereas when I moved first to Andheri (E) from Dombivli, commute time saving was the overriding advantage that made me move). Takshila in Andheri (E) was a yuppie (young upwardly mobile) kind-of community. Mother could not easily fit in there. She did have some contacts but it was different. I too had changed and become more appreciative of my traditional roots. So I was also becoming a misfit there.

Late 1992 to most of 1993 was a great 'churning' period of my life where I took/was forced to take some major decisions of my life. So I thought I should write about it in some detail.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dharmakshetra Sai centre of Mumbai and all those who participate in it as devotees and as devotee-administrators, for the vital spiritual exposure I got to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's life and teachings there, through the spiritual ambience in the main hall and through its bookstall.

1994 - Feb. 1999: Back to Dombivli; A balanced spiritual-cum-work life

We moved back to Dombivli, initially to our 'deposit' flat (the first 'deposit' flat in Ganga Nivas building in Ayre Road that we had moved to in early 80s from Bandra (E)). It was in rather bad shape but we managed to live in it.

In a short time I was able to apply for an HDFC loan for a small flat in a nearby area to the 'deposit' flat. I was surprised and rather offended that HDFC would not give me much money as I now was a 'risky' independent consultant. My latest tax return was not very healthy as I had taken a lot of time off and was exploring the domestic market. As an employee in a SEEPZ software company, they would have given me a lot more money. I was learning the realities of being an independent entrepreneur - of course, HDFC was right, a single individual consultant with a not-so-great recent tax return is a huge risk.

We moved to the small ownership flat in Nav-Chetan society in Tukaram Nagar, quite close to Ganga Nivas building on Ayre Road. I bought the flat from Maharashtrians who were Buddhists. I think this was my first interaction with Maharashtrian Buddhists. Perhaps they were Hindu Dalit converts to Buddhism and were followers of the great Dalit leader, B.R. Ambedkar, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B. R. Ambedkar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._R._Ambedkar) (who himself converted to Buddhism later on in life). There were some issues with documentation for HDFC loan for which we had to struggle as they (sellers) needed to get the documents from the

housing society which was slow in response. In this process, I got to know the sellers (husband & wife) quite well, and also had some interactions with their son. Eventually the documentation got sorted out and the flat purchase (by me, sale by them) went through smoothly. We continued to be in touch for some months afterwards. I think I also visited them in the flat they had moved to in Mulund/Bhandup somewhere, IIRC.

Nav-Chetan was a lower middle-class conservative society of mainly Maharashtrians with some South Indians too. Our opposite door neighbour was a Malayali Christian. Mother got along very well with the lady of that flat - my mother's entire education was in Malayalam. Brother X (I am not naming him as I have chosen to avoid naming relatives of my generation in this book version), a slightly distant cousin who I had not known about earlier but whose mother was well known to my mother, IIRC, lived in another wing of the same Nav-Chetan society. Brother X and his family were very helpful to mother and me to settle down in Nav-Chetan. Family friends were nearby as the old 'deposit' flat Ganga Nivas bldg. was nearby. Brother's family too was nearby. I felt as if I have moved into a family base. Taking care of mother now seemed not so tough a task as it was when I was living cut-off from this family base in Andheri (E).

Mastek years

In a short period of time I had settled down to the Dombivli lower-middle class life. On the work front, I had realized that the local market for a software consultant/free lancer at that time, did not offer very good money as compared to the software exports world. It was almost as if one is talking

Rupees in the local market and in the export market one is talking US Dollars. No comparison! IIRC even before I moved to Dombivli I had started offering my services as a software consultant to Mastek in SEEPZ. The office of Mastek in SEEPZ then was one floor below Boshu Technics Corp., my previous firm! Sometimes I would even bump into Mr. Basu on the staircase - it was always a cordial interaction.

My main customer contact, in the initial years of my stint with Mastek, was one of its directors, Mr. Sudhakar Ram (I believe he now is the Managing Director; then IIRC, it was Mr Ashank Desai). Sudhakar was appreciative of my technical strengths. To avoid getting into stress problems, I had decided to limit myself to only offering technical advice as a consultant or take up individual assignment work. I would be responsible for my technical advice and for any individual assignments I do. But I would not be responsible for the project management part. Sudhakar had no problems with that. As I moved to Dombivli and my mother's health started sliding, I sometimes had to work from home - no Internet connection then as I did not even have a BSNL phone. [BTW I bought my first PC during this time as I needed it to work from home. It was quite an experience then to have my 'own' computer.] Sudhakar was very open to such work arrangements (in 1994 or so) - I did my bit by maintaining detailed timesheets and providing a monthly report of hours worked and corresponding work accomplishments, along with my invoice. BTW I used to charge by the hour. I was with Mastek for over seven and a half years (Nov. 93 to Jun. 2001) as an independent software consultant charging by the hour for most of the stint. Not once did Sudhakar or later customer contact points of mine raise

questions about the invoices I raised! I am grateful to Mastek for having provided such a flexible working environment for me which enabled me to earn money as well as take care of my family (me + mother).

During this time I had become committed to the spiritual path, treating my software consultancy work as secondary to it. But I was faithful to doing a good quality job in the hours I allotted for the work. From a money earning point of view, I earned enough to take care of my lower middle-class Dombivli life quite comfortably even if I could put in only around 100 hours of work each month. But in comparison to juniors and peers, my career nosedived. From a hotshot software guy in Datamatics and Boshu, I had become somebody whose career has got sidelined. Those peers and juniors who continued to work in SEEPZ rose to high management positions and had a lifestyle to match. The easily visible aspect of it was that they bought small cars to start with, moving to fancier cars over time. In contrast I used to initially travel by train and bus. Later I switched to train and Auto. Clearly I was lagging behind in the financial and money power aspects of life.

But they used to respect me for my knowledge and for my decision to explore spirituality. I had to learn to control any jealousy pangs that I had when I saw juniors and people who were perhaps less capable than me in software, become far more important than me in the software industry. That was not easy. I had not realized how tough these challenges can be when one takes to the spiritual path. It is a path of worldly sacrifice, of having to sometimes struggle for material things and comforts which come very easily to people who focus mainly on the worldly path.

One important point for me which allowed me to maintain my dignity was that I viewed myself as an independent businessman offering a service to a customer. So even when in Mastek my customer contact point became somebody who was somewhat junior in years and in software capability to me, I was able to view him as a customer contact point rather than my boss. It may seem like a minor ego issue. But as I realized with quite a shock then, it is these ego issues which are the great challenges of spiritual life. If I had to 'report' to somebody who is somewhat junior to me in capability and years, a lot of my peers and juniors would have looked at me with pity. And that piteous look would have been something that I could not have tolerated. But since I had this stand of independent consultant, it put matters in a different context.

In Mastek itself, secretarial staff while filling up some forms would sometimes ask me who is my boss/manager. I would reply that so-and-so is my customer contact point or something to that effect ☺! They would wonder a little but they got the information they needed to fill against the boss/manager column in their form. Initially I had tried to have multiple customers - Mastek and some other companies - but I found it to be a hassle considering that I had to spend significant time on the home front and my spiritual interests. Later I decided to focus only on Mastek as my single customer.

On the technical side, I had expected that as I was spending only about 100 to 120 hours on the average on software work (rest being taken up by mother care, home, spiritual activities and commute from Dombivli to SEEPZ), like in the financial and power aspects of my career, I would be sliding to a middling grade technical chap in Mastek (and other companies

that I offered my services). I considered it to be part of the sacrifice in the path I had chosen for this stage of my life. Surprisingly for me, it turned out that I was doing a pretty good job in technical consultancy even with my work hour limits! I did some individual assignments like suggesting a GUI for Mastek's 4th Gen. tool - I don't think it got adopted but the work, IIRC, met the approval of Sudhakar. As it was, IIRC, one of my first assignments in Mastek, I think it helped to show my calibre. Other individual assignments were writing a GUI design guide for business apps. - that received lot of approval including from at least one of its customers abroad. Doing the Object Oriented Analysis and Design for a Process Simulator software for a German customer of Mastek was very challenging. I later had to provide guidance to programmers implementing the design. Overall this was a great success.

Besides these individual assignments, I became a kind-of tech. trouble-shooter for many projects. The typical life-cycle would be that the project would be in a sort-of technical crisis at which time a cry for help would come to Tech. Cell of which I had become a part, and some such cries for help would be directed to me. I would have to get involved with the project, take on the tech. challenges, stabilize the project and then withdraw. I played these kind of roles for various projects involving technologies like:

- Internet user profiling tool involving TCP/IP, C++, multi-threading, Unix, Windows, Web server APIs
- C++ and Microsoft ATL/COM
- Windows Hooks

- Microsoft ActiveX Controls development, Microsoft MFC

One unusual cry for help came from a project group that had been provided a test database oriented business application by a US customer. I do not recall the programming language used but it could have been Microsoft Visual Basic. The US customer (a software consultancy itself) employed a technical consultant to review the test application code, and that person gave a scathing report citing lack of readability, bad variable names and, in general, difficult to maintain code. When I reviewed the code, I agreed with the US tech. consultant's views and started instructing the small team (maybe 2 or 3 programmers with one lead) to rewrite the code using coding standards and guidelines that I pointed them to, IIRC. What I clearly recall was that it took at least three to four review rounds before I gave the green signal. I think most of the team came from vernacular language school education background. The lack of English fluency was hitting them rather hard in coming up with appropriate names for variables and functions. The team had got quite frustrated but my job as the tech. consultant was to maintain quality and I stuck to my guns about having good meaningful names for variables and functions. I think they had got the function decomposition and structured programming part in the initial rounds itself - English was the problem. When it was shipped back to the customer, the same US tech. consultant wrote a glowing report and mentioned that he was amazed that the same team/company now had delivered such beautiful and easy to maintain code. This signal turn-around success went up right

to the directors of Mastek and I think kind-of made my reputation as a reliable tech. problem solver for the company.

An additional and very important responsibility was interviewing candidates for various in house and offshore project work. Once again there I think I was able to make a mark in Mastek. I think candidates that I okayed (technically) would usually do well. That made me a good interviewer for HR (Human Resource dept.). I used to carefully look at the skill requirements needed for the job (as provided to me in a form) and use all my technical experience as well as life experience to gauge whether the candidate had it. I learned a lot about interviewing from practice. During the latter stage of my stay in Mastek, I used to interview one or two candidates every day. It would take me an hour or so to vet a successful candidate. Rejecting a candidate sometimes would be over in the first ten minutes of the interview, though from a human/compassion point of view, I would let it go on for some time so that the candidate at least felt that he/she had been heard. Many times, the candidates would be quite desperate. I realized that I was the key person deciding whether these desperate to break into software export company persons make it or not! And if they made it, their life would change dramatically for the better from a material point of view. That made me handle this responsibility with a lot of thought and care. I would ensure that I make a person comfortable and show his/her best colours in the interview. If it seemed to me that the person has to be rejected I would try to give additional chances for the person to change my decision. Of course, I would not convey the rejection directly to the candidate. But I would try to show to the candidate that his/her answers had

been wrong or that they did not know something well enough. I felt it was part of my job as an interviewer. The candidate could learn from the experience, improve on his/her skills and then try again with Mastek or elsewhere. I think most candidates understood by my remarks whether they were getting through or not. The tough part emotionally was dealing with the disappointment in the faces of candidates who realized from my comments that I am not satisfied with their skills, especially female candidates. But I had to be faithful to my task - I could not and did not push through anybody who did not meet the needs as per my assessment.

Mastek was thoroughly professional in this regard. Never once was I asked to review my interview technical comments by anybody. They may have organized another interview for some which is fine, though I do not know of such cases. Never once was I threatened by any candidate who got rejected. Now these may seem pretty standard stuff for a Mumbai software company. But later I learned about companies and organizations in semi-urban and rural India and how vital procuring jobs is for people. People can use all sorts of levers to land a job. A job interviewer in such a setup would be under tremendous psychological and other pressure from various quarters when interviewing such 'leveraged' candidates. And there is nothing much one can do about the situation. Nepotism, nasty politics and corruption are inescapable brutal realities of life in semi-urban and rural India (and to some extent, urban India as well). I think we software industry guys are extraordinarily fortunate to be/have been in a sunrise industry which had/has very little or none of the nepotism,

nasty politics and corruption of many of the other walks of life in India.

Later I analyzed how I acquired a decent reputation in Mastek, even though I was putting in only 100 to 120 hours of work. The point that struck me was that the growth path career wise after four to five years of programming/design work, in software consultancy divisions of companies like Mastek (or Datamatics for that matter) was typically the managerial path. Mastek also had a product development centre at Pune which had very strong technical people with many years of experience below their belt. But in the consultancy division few people opted for a technical-only path after five or six years. So in the consultancy division, the supply of techies with many years of experience was low. A guy like me could bring his many years of experience to a technical problem and see solutions which younger software developers simply could not see. Further I invested 20 to 30 % of my time (from the 100 to 120 hours) on the average, to knowledge upgradation - mainly books & Internet but sometimes attending seminars/workshops (paid by Mastek). Besides recommending books to Mastek library to buy (I could pick up books for Mastek and get the money reimbursed), I also allocated a percentage of my earnings to purchasing technical books for myself! Sometimes I was not sure whether I could justify buying a new technology book for Mastek but I felt it could be useful in future. To avoid any issues I bought it from my own earnings. While new technologies were always propping up, I could use my knowledge of old technology to understand a newer or different form of technology far more quickly than youngsters. E.g. Acquiring top-level expertise in CORBA was

not so difficult for me as I was very well exposed to (Microsoft) DCOM.

My stint at Mastek was a very happy one. I was able to provide the customer satisfaction and as Mastek grew I was able to raise my consultancy rates in sync. with the raises they were giving their employees. Never once did they reject my hike in rates (as it would be in keeping or slightly below what I perceived as the company raise average for software developers). My work was relatively stress-free. I was usually very sure of my technical advice and was usually able to handle any concerns/questions related to it. If I did not know a technical area, I learned to say frankly that I don't know even if it meant disappointing person(s) who had approached me.

Life had become very pleasant, a far-cry from the Boshu Technics days. I also had become a one-man-show businessman. I had to raise invoices and had to file a business income-tax return using a tax consultant. I had to understand depreciation and how I can deduct business expenses from my invoiced revenue but should be able to prove to Income Tax, if they ask me, that I did make those expenses and that they were for the business. Though it was a one-man-show business, it was still a business, and exposed me to some part of life of a businessman. While in Boshu Technics, I was an employee and did not really see the finance part of the business as that was kept very confidential by the sole proprietor, Mr. Basu.

The software-consultant stint also changed my life perspective somewhat. I started comparing myself to the shopkeepers and Auto/Taxi owner-drivers I saw in Dombivli and other places. They decided when to open their shop/ply their vehicle and

shut it down. They were dependent on customers for their income. They had no 'job security'. It was a very direct and simple business situation. Work hard, sell goods/services and earn money commensurate to your work. If you laze off you lose business. For me, it was quite similar - I was selling services. Success and failure depended to a large extent on me and me alone. If I fell sick there was no money to be earned for that period - no notion of sick leave came into play. If I wanted to take 'casual leave' - well, it would be without earning! That brought in a lot of maturity in me about life in general. I was able to empathize much better than earlier with shopkeepers who were facing bad times; with daily workers who do not get work sometimes etc.

I am grateful to my Mastek friends and colleagues for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names, except for some of the top bosses of Mastek. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any Mastek friend who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

Sometime in second half of 2018, I sent, in gratitude, two paperback copies of my Who am I? I am I .. book to personal secretary of Sudhakar Ram to pass on to Sudhakar and to Ketan Mehta (who, I was told, was in the USA then). After Sudhakar Ram, the only other Mastek director with whom I have had significant amount of interactions was Ketan. I recall that when I moved on from Mastek to Continuum, Ketan spared some of his valuable time to have a nice chat with me in his cabin, where he spoke some nice words about me.

Given below are some compressed pics of appreciation and experience letters from Mastek. Larger versions of pics of these and other such letters can be seen here: Documenting my part auto bio with pics - computer software industry appreciation and experience letters,

https://ravisier.blogspot.com/2018/12/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics_27.html, 27th Dec. 2018



MASTEK
Mastek Limited
106, SDF IV, SEEPZ, Andheri(E)
Mumbai - 400 096, INDIA.
Tel: 91-22- 8290535 / 8247999
Fax: 91-22-8290557
Home Page: <http://www.mastek.com>

September 28, 2000

Mr. Ravi Iyer
Consultant

Dear Ravi,

Congratulations!

This Pat of Back (POB) award is awarded to you for the successful completion of the first offshore pilot project, for Fujitsu, Japan.

This project was critical to establish long term relation with Fujitsu and create reference account in a Japanese Market. I am happy to announce, during execution of this project, you have as an active team member demonstrated team work, technical competence, and commitment.

During product design, you have taken innovative ideas to communicate between frontend Visual Basic applications and backend VC++ applications using hooks. This helped us to successfully deliver the product.

This project delivery enabled Mastek to negotiate for long term relation with Fujitsu and also helped to develop a new account with ComDesign as a Development partner to provide WEB based Call Center and Networking solution.

I wish in future you will show the same spirit and commitment


Ashwin Shah
Group Software Manager
Mastek Ltd.

Regd. Office : 804-805, President House, Opp. C. N. Vidyalaya, Near Ambawadi Circle, Ahmedabad - 380 006.



Mastek Limited
#106, SDF IV, SEEPZ, Andheri (E)
Mumbai - 400 096
Tel.: 91-22-8290635 / 8292045
8290182
Fax: 91-22-8290657
Home Page: <http://www.mastek.com>

Letter of Appreciation

October 6, 1999

Mr. Ravi Iyer
Consultant

Dear Ravi,

Congratulations!

On behalf of HR and Technology Cell we appreciate your efforts in conducting technical interviews. Your contribution has helped Mastek in evaluating technical skills of new entrants at an objective level, which is the need for any organization.

Well Done!

Regards,

Kishor Bhalerao
Group Sr. Vice President - H.R.

Regd. Office : 804-805, President House, Opp. C.N. Vidyalaya, Near Ambawadi Circle, Ahmedabad - 380 006

10th August 2002

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Mr. Ravi Iyer was associated with our organization from 6th December 1993 to 30th June 2001 as a Technical Consultant.

He has left us on his own accord. During his tenure of association with us, he has proved himself to be sincere and hardworking.

We wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

For MASTEK LIMITED,



Sunita Rath,
Asst. Manager - HR

MASTEK LIMITED, #106, SDF - IV, Seepz, Andheri (E), Mumbai - 400 096, India.
Tel.: 91-22- 6952222 / 8247999 Fax: 91-22- 6951331. www.mastek.com
Regd. Off.: 804 / 805, President House, Opp. C. N. Vidyalaya,
Near Ambawadi Circle, Ambawadi, Ahmedabad - 380 006, India.



Social and Spiritual Aspects

Very quickly mother and I had got resettled in our Dombivli circle of family and friends. We were part of a large community again. At Takshila, Andheri (E), we could not get that community feeling despite our trying quite a bit. As a family unit, mother and I did make some friends among neighbours in Takshila but the lifestyle and interests were too different for it to be a deep contact. In Dombivli, our Tamil Iyer community itself was significant. Further we had our old Malayali, Maharashtrian and other family friends. Mother especially was welcomed back by the Malayali family friends as 'Amme'. Visitors to our home to see mother were not infrequent.

After some months, maybe half a year, of moving back to Dombivli, by which time we were properly resettled in Dombivli, including moving to the ownership flat, I started exploring the Sathya Sai Baba community presence in Dombivli. This would be sometime in 1994 I guess. I saw a board next to a blood bank and pediatric clinic very close to Dombivli railway station on the East side, mentioning Sathya Sai Baba. It turned out to be a meeting place every Sunday, IIRC, for singing Bhajans, of a group of pretty enthusiastic Sathya Sai Baba devotees, presided over by a middle-aged Maharashtrian pediatrician (child-specialist medical doctor). I was cordially invited to join them and did so.

Very quickly I became a part of that community. There were many youngsters, most of whom were Tamilians, and they were very friendly. The chief of the group, the pediatrician, spoke with quite some spiritual confidence, and was clearly a high-

flyer type of person. The group used to conduct blood donation camps once in a while and also do some other service to society activities. I was encouraged to learn and try to sing Bhajans. Under their encouragement I tried and they tolerated my struggling bhajans (just one bhajan every time for me as a learner). I also participated in some of their service activities.

Slowly I came to know that this group is a splinter/parallel group which broke away from the official Sri Sathya Sai Seva (service) Samithi (association) of Dombivli! That was my first exposure to the splintering that is perhaps unavoidable in spiritual groups across the world. Enthusiastic individuals who get inspired by some spiritual master/teaching find the official group to be too slow, too conservative, too resistant to change, and so start off a splinter group. Some splinters become strong and result in a separate denomination within the broad spiritual group. But, it seems to me, most splinters find it hard to survive the test of time and wither away over time.

I did not want to get caught up in this splintering/politics. I visited the official samithi bhajan session too which would be on Thursday evening. The official samithi was much larger in number. Its leaders spoke well and were friendly. There were quite a few rules to be followed but that seemed to make it a more disciplined and well behaved following rather than an oppressive group. The leader was a retired Indian Navy man originally from Darjeeling named Mr. M.B. Rai. He was not as sophisticated as the pediatrician leader of the splinter group but, IMHO, more than made up for it by his sincerity and friendliness. After all, the spiritual group's motto was Love All Serve All and Help Ever Hurt Never. [I think the motto is difficult to implement/achieve fully in actual practice. But as

an ideal to shoot for, it is certainly a very noble one.] I decided to keep my options open by visiting both groups which was feasible as its main bhajan meetings were on different days of the week.

By now my life had stabilized. Looking after mother was becoming more of an issue to be seriously considered. Her health slowly started sliding. Not too serious but she found it a burden to do the cooking and other house work. Getting the right maid who could follow mother's instructions and also get along with her was a vital factor. Somehow we were not getting the right maid. If the maid wouldn't come in the morning I could not leave for work. BTW I used flexi-hours at Mastek and would go to office around 11.30 AM to avoid rush hour crowd in the trains and on the road (I would catch the train in Dombivli around 10 AM).

I realized that I should seriously consider marriage if I come across a suitable girl who would be willing to take care of mother and be a home-maker. She also should be inclined towards spirituality - a Sathya Sai Baba devotee would be very appropriate. I was around 32/33 years of age, earning decent money from a Dombivli earning-level view, even if self-employed, and had a small ownership flat! My digestion problem was under control - still a problem but something that was manageable. Actually, with a bit of a shock, I realized that I was quite an eligible bachelor in the Dombivli South Indian community. Attending marriages of our community in Dombivli was becoming a tricky affair as the match-makers would target me ☺. Elders in the Dombivli community would pester me about it. I felt, yes, elders are giving sensible advise - how long can I manage my mother responsibility alone. A

maid is a maid - I cannot expect her to be as reliable and trustworthy as a wife. Besides a wife who shares my spiritual inclination would be a good life-mate on my spiritual journey. And most of the Sathya Sai Baba devotee community were family people and not renunciate (sannyasi/sannyasini) types. In fact, there was not one sannyasi/sannyasini in the entire Sathya Sai official and splinter group communities in Dombivli. Though there were a very few bachelor and spinster types but that seemed to be due to financial and other reasons. They were still very much family people.

But somehow getting a suitable partner for marriage did not work out. [I have omitted some sensitive stuff.]

Due to some incident, I decided to part ways from the splinter group and focus my energies on the official spiritual group. It was quite a wrench - the splinter group members who would meet me would invite me repeatedly to attend. I would excuse myself without trying to get deep into the matter. I did not want to disturb their faith in that group.

I became committed to the official Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi in Dombivli. It was a far more controlled, conservative and peaceful group, even if it lacked some dynamism. I was looked upon as an eligible bachelor there. I was a little surprised by two ladies in the Samithi showing gentle interest in me, one from perhaps her own interest point of view and another for a friend of hers, who was in the same samithi. The latter, a married girl, spoke to me frankly asking whether I would be interested in marrying her friend! My gut-feeling was that the ladies concerned were looking for more of a regular family life, whereas I was quite committed to a spiritually intense life.

I felt that they may get frustrated by having to focus on taking care of my mother and my relative disinterest in materially prosperous life. I felt that I had lived the materially prosperous life during my employee of software company years including the foreign stints in USA & Europe, and had a been-there-done-it attitude towards it whereas the ladies concerned would naturally want to experience such a life. So I quietly and politely declined.

Meanwhile I got a fantastic maid! If I recall correctly, her name was Ranjana. She got along well with my mother, and she was a staunch devotee of a village goddess from her native Karnataka. She would do some specific rituals for her goddess (carrying the goddess idol on her head through her locality) on some occasions. She also had heard of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and was very respectful of him. I considered her to be an absolute God-send (or Sathya Sai Baba-send). I paid her well so that she had enough financial interest to continue working with us. Some commented that I was paying her too much. But what they did not realize is that her coming regularly and on time allowed me to earn far more money by doing Mastek work! To me, her salary was a somewhat-small percentage of my earnings.

However, money alone could not have bought the love and affection with which she looked after mother. She came in the morning and took care of activities involving mother, cooking food and lot of other home stuff. I would go to office after she would come in. This arrangement stabilized in a very solid way. I did not have to think about marriage for somebody to look after mother. She served us till my mother passed away (in Feb. 1999). I am deeply grateful to her for her service to

my mother. I paid her for a few months more even after she had stopped work with me, till she got a suitable replacement work. Some years later, perhaps after I had moved to Puttaparthi and was on a visit to Dombivli, say around 2003/2004, I bumped into her on the road. IIRC, I wanted to have a small conversation/chat with her. She wished me but could not hold back her tears. Maybe she recalled my mother and that brought tears to her eyes. I don't think I was able to have a conversation with her then and we politely parted. I earnestly pray to God to shower His Grace on her (Ranjana) and her family.

I should mention that I had refused to have a TV in my Dombivli flat (Nav-Chetan society) where I was living with mother. I think this would have been influenced by the impression I had gained from my readings of Sathya Sai literature that Sathya Sai advised very limited or no TV viewing for serious spiritual aspirants, and/or by the knowledge that TV was not allowed in Prasanthi Nilayam ashram.

Refusing to have a TV installed in my flat earned me a lot of criticism from at least one of my neighbours, the Malayali Christian family who were devout Christians but also lived a regular life with some TV watching as part of their life. I felt that having a TV will bring in all the worldly tamasha (drama) stuff into our flat and spoil the spiritual atmosphere. I don't think Dombivli TV cable then (second half of 1990s) had significant spiritual/religious channels. It was regular world channels focused on Indian soap operas (serials), movies, movie songs, sports and news. I wanted to reduce such worldly stuff to an absolute minimum in our flat then and so insisted on

no TV. I provided mother a music player and books (in Malayalam as that was what she was proficient in), mainly about spirituality & religion.

Some may say that I was too strict by enforcing a no TV policy on mother. Note that I too did not see TV then but that was out of my choice. Of course, a lot of friends, relatives and neighbours dropped in to our flat from time to time. So mother surely had that company and it was not a secluded life. But there was no TV and so when she was alone at home, she had to do without TV. She had a chanting bead-necklace (which is still with me in April 2019) and I think I may have suggested to or encouraged her to chant the holy name that she was comfortable with, when she was alone in the flat. Note that she had very strong devotional Hindu background but I think in earlier years it was more of puja of various gods & goddesses in the home shrine. Now she was not in a position to do such puja due to her health challenges. I think the no TV policy during the last few years of her life in my flat, helped her in her spiritual journey. And traditionally, such a life in old age during the last few years of one's life, is not unusual in Hinduism.

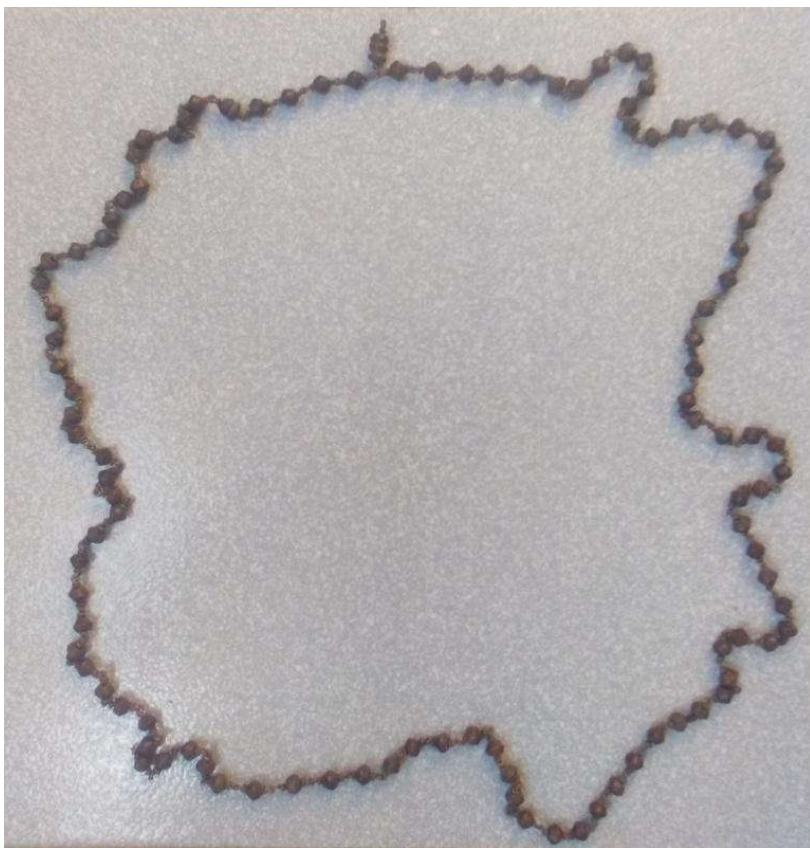
Below pic is of my mother - Lakshme Parvathi (Rashamma) - born 1930s, died 1999. I think the pic may have been taken in first half of 1970s but I am not sure. The other possibility is second half of 1960s as the pic is extracted from what seems to be a group pic of Central Railway Officers' Colony lady friends of mother.



My mother – Lakshme Parvathi (Rashamma)

Given below are few compressed pics of my mother's chanting bead-necklace (which is still with me in April 2019). Larger versions of these pics can be seen here: Documenting my part auto bio with pics of my mother's chanting bead-necklace, https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2019/04/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics_21.html, 21st Apr. 2019





Samithi

I started getting deeply involved with the official Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi in Dombivli. I arranged my timings with Mastek such that I could attend the Thursday evening bhajan at Hanuman mandir/temple near Dombivli (E) Railway station with the temple being located within a police station compound. The photo of this Hanuman mandir and its caretaker can be seen in this blog post: Dombivli (E) Hanuman Mandir: Fond memories of it as Sathya Sai samithi would have Thursday bhajans there,

<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2015/08/dombivli-e-ram-mandir-fond-memories-of.html>, 11th Aug. 2015.

I also participated in other activities like Study Circle, Medical Camp, Narayan Seva (feeding of the poor) as well as Sunday bhajans. Soon I was treated as a trustworthy member by the official Sathya Sai community. I found out about their lives, problems, how they got devoted to Swami. It was a fascinating view of lower middle class life and a little of upper middle class life across Maharashtrians, Kannidagas, Telugus, Malayalis and the rather large Tamil members of the samithi in Dombivli. North Indians were rather few.

The convener of the samithi, Mr. M.B. Rai and his wife, were very helpful to me and some other youngsters in understanding the Sai organization principles and rules. They were also very loving though the convener was strict when needed (he had retired from the Indian Navy). I am very grateful to him and his wife for the guidance he gave about the organization, and also about Swami.

One Tamil family, Sai Manickam and his parents, who had lot of Puttaparthi experiences of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, shared a lot about them with me, and they turned out to be distant relatives of mine! I am very grateful to them for their sharing of Sathya Sai and Puttaparthi experiences with me and the love I received from them.

I was made a proper member of the organization and given the opportunity to participate in two week Seva offerings twice a year at Puttaparthi ashram (Prasanthi Nilayam). For around three to four years I regularly went for these Seva visits -

instead of taking a vacation I would offer two week Seva at Puttaparthi twice a year. During this period mother would be taken care of by my sister in Chembur or my brother in Dombivli. The Puttaparthi Seva stint was a very unusual experience. We lost our normal worklife or family life identities and became just 'Seva Dal'. The men had to do duties like maintaining crowd discipline, maintaining entry/exit registers for accommodation facilities of the ashram, security gate work, serving food in the canteen etc. The ladies did a lot of similar activities in ladies only areas and also handled many tough cleaning duties. We would work in a team with some team members being rather important people in their regular lives - once a Seva Dal offering duty of controlling crowds in the mandir complex, of which I was the leader, was a sitting minister from Maharashtra! It was a novel collective experience of doing humble and joyous service to our Guru.

There were some unpleasant aspects like getting shouted at by the permanent staff at times but we treated that as a kind of jocular-test of our spiritual tolerance! We would tell each other that these permanent ashram staff seem to be a frustrated lot and that they need to vent their frustration on somebody. Our living quarters were rather spartan as is to be expected in an ashram. I got used to such spartan life and actually liked it, at that time. [Later I realized that some permanent residents of the ashram had made their rooms rather comfortable which also I understood as they were family type of people working for the ashram and not ascetics. But some rather spartan accommodation - dormitory type - was also used by permanent residents who were not so well off financially.] A big prize for us was that at the end of the Seva period offering, usually

Swami would walk between seated rows of Seva Dal giving us an opportunity to touch his feet or offer something like a letter to him.

Once I was a participant of a World Youth Conference at Puttaparthi. That gave me interesting exposure to other youth Sathya Sai devotees across the world. All these Puttaparthi visits made me quite familiar with at least the external aspects of Puttaparthi. There was a lot of greenery in areas around Puttaparthi. I very much loved that open space and greenery coming from congested Mumbai and very congested Dombivli. I also was asked to attend some Maharashtra organization meetings for youth, and some Thane district level meetings of the Sai organization. I started playing an 'inner circle' kind of role in the Dombivli Sathya Sai samithi. I was made the announcer of messages at the important Thursday bhajan. That exposed me to communications coming from District and State level to the Samithis. All this gave me a fairly decent picture of the Maharashtra Sathya Sai organization including some of its tensions and politics. Getting physically close to Swami when Swami visited Mumbai or when Maharashtra organized functions were held in Puttaparthi, was the big thing for which some politics inevitably came into play. People would grumble but having seen a fair bit of the world by then, I felt the level of politics is quite minor and inescapable for the sizeable organization that the Maharashtra Sathya Sai organization was. Overall I was very impressed by the dedication of key office bearers of the organization and how they tried to follow the teachings to the extent possible of love all, serve all and help ever, hurt never.

Dombivli samithi became a moral base for me. My caring for my mother earned appreciation and respect from the Samithi people. That helped me handle some people in society who wondered whether something was wrong with me. I think they felt that the natural thing for me was to get married. Why am I not marrying and asking my wife to take care of my mother? Is something wrong with me which is preventing me from getting married? Over time they saw that I was a spiritual type person, especially when I started practicing bhajan singing at home or was playing bhajans on a music player at home. The Sathya Sai bhajans are Namavalis typically i.e. just names of God, and they included Maharashtrian Hindu names of God like Vitthal, Pandurang besides Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu, Ganesha, Rama, Krishna etc. The conservative community of Dombivli had (and may still have) tremendous respect for people who did such activities. But they expected to hear this kind of stuff from rural and semi-urban communities like the Varkari community (followers of Maharashtra's Bhakti tradition who worship Vitthal/Vithoba, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varkari>). That an urbanised software techie like me was doing it struck some people with quite some wonder. Perhaps they then classified me as a God-crazy fellow and therefore a harmless fellow who should not be troubled ☺.

The framed pic of Sathya Sai below (compressed version) became my main Sathya Sai photo in my home (in Dombivli). I had it hung in the front room of my small flat where I was living with my mother. I used to pray often to this photo. This became my main worship photo of Sathya Sai in my Dombivli years after early 1990s. I still (in April 2019) have this photo with me and it is put up in my small Puttaparthi flat.

Larger version of this pic and other related pics can be seen in this post: Documenting my part auto bio with pics of Devas (Divine beings/gods) that I would (and continue to) pray to, <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2019/04/documenting-my-part-auto-bio-with-pics.html>, 3rd April 2019

Note that this Sathya Sai framed photo is a big one - around 16 inches width and around 20 inches height.



Mother too started developing belief in Sathya Sai and was reverential towards him. She once told me that when she was worried about repayment of the home loan I had taken from HDFC (which I repaid in full later on), Sathya Sai (Swami) appeared in her dream. IIRC, she said that Swami told her that it is he who is taking care of me (and us perhaps) and that she

should not worry, or something on those lines. That may have calmed her concerns about me and my ability to repay the HDFC home loan. I was happy that Swami came in her dream and gave her confidence.

Mother was very much into our Tamil Brahmin community Hindu rituals and faith, and also used to chant some mantras associated with it. Sathya Sai was an additional god-figure in the many gods & goddesses that figure in our rituals and faith.

I am grateful to my Dombivli Sathya Sai Samithi devotee friends as well as Maharashtra Sathya Sai orgn. devotee friends for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names, except for a few persons. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any Maharashtra Sai devotee friend who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

Below pic (compressed version): I am not sure of even the rough date when it was taken. I have only the pic without the context document to get an idea of the date. I think it must have been in the mid 1990s (say 1995, at which time I would have been around 33 years of age), by which time I had got associated with Sathya Sai movement and probably done or was going to do my first Prasanthi Seva at Prasanthi Nilayam (Puttaparthi). The slight moustache that I had earlier is gone. The hair has still not thinned in a big way and does not openly show signs of greying :-), and so it must be before 2000! If I recall correctly, I shaved off my moustache before my first Prasanthi Seva as my Dombivli samithi convener and/or other

elders had indicated, if I recall correctly, that clean shaven is what is preferred for Prasanthi Seva.



Larger version of this pic and some other pics of me, can be seen here: Some old pics of me (Ravi S. Iyer), <https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/12/some-old-pics-of-me.html>, 25th Dec. 2018.

Given below are extracts (slightly edited) from my blog post:
The importance of feelings in spiritual endeavour,
<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-importance-of-feelings-in-spiritual.html>, June 2015.

In the context of realizing the ultimate truth of our existence, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba wrote in a letter (heart should be understood in this context as feelings, the feeling heart):

It is the heart that reaches the goal; follow the heart.

A pure heart seeks beyond the intellect. It gets inspired. Whatever we do reacts upon us, if we do good, we shall have happiness and if evil, unhappiness. Within you is the mighty ocean of nectar divine. Seek it within you, feel it, feel it, it is here, the Self. It is not the body, the mind, the intellect, the brain. It is not the desire of the desiring. It is not the object of desire.

Above all these you are. All these are simply manifestations. You appear as the smiling flower, as the twinkling star. What is there in the world, which can make you desire anything?

Reference: <http://www.saibaba.ws/teachings/swamilettters.htm>.
[Note that I have corrected what seems to be one error in this reference where instead of feel it (repeated twice), it is given as feel it, free it. I also corrected an additional couple or so small errors. Here's another reference largely matching what I have given above: How to Receive Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Grace By Satya Pal Ruhela, Page 66,

https://books.google.co.in/books?id=sAEnqQ_MFjoC&pg=PA66.]

BTW I first came across the above quotation of Swami in the old museum (not the new Chaitanya Jyoti museum) in Prasanthi Nilayam (Puttaparthi) around the mid 90s when I was working as a software consultant in the IT export industry in Mumbai. I was so taken up by it that I copied it in a notebook and then got it printed in bold font, framed and hung in my apartment (in Nav-Chetan society) in Dombivli (outskirts of Mumbai), along with one or two other quotations of Swami, if I recall correctly. That ensured that I would keep seeing these quotations of Bhagavan on a regular basis.

This above quotation of Bhagavan has played an important role in my spiritual journey by giving noble feelings like selfless & unconditional love more importance than intellectual analysis & understanding of Hindu philosophical scripture like the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Of course, Hindu philosophical scripture does have its great importance but the feeling/emotion of selfless love, IMHO, is of higher value in the spiritual quest.

Baba puts it so simply that even a child can understand it, but yet so powerfully, so authoritatively, "Love is God. Live in Love." Very importantly, Baba demonstrated that 'living in love' in His life, even if on a few rare occasions the love took the form of some 'tough love' ☺. So it is not as if He was telling us some impractical theory - He demonstrated it in practice for us to have a practical example to be inspired by and to follow, or at least, try earnestly to follow ☺.

--- end blog post extracts ---

Given below are extracts (slightly edited) from another blog post of mine which give some additional information but may also repeat some information provided earlier for which I request the kind indulgence of readers: Claimed paranormal connections via mediums to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba; Splinter devotee groups,

<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2014/07/paranormal-connections-via-mediums-to.html>, 24th July 2014.

I felt it appropriate to share my experiences in a Maharashtra Sathya Sai samithi regarding such matters (splinter groups in Sathya Sai movement) when Swami (Sathya Sai) was in his physical form itself. I came to know of Swami through Sathya Sai literature. Sometime around 1992-93 when I was living either in a company provided flat or (later) in a rented flat in Andheri (E), Mumbai which was very close to Dharmakshetra (Sathya Sai organization centre in Mumbai,

<http://www.dharmakshetra.org/>), I happened to wander into Dharmakshetra on one of my walks (I used to do a lot of leisure walking on holidays typically) and was very taken up by the sayings of Swami put up in the Dharmakshetra main hall. In a short time I was in the Dharmakshetra bookshop and then the great treasure of Sai literature there, available at a very cheap price, cast a tremendous spell on me. [Note that I was initially an employee of a company when I was staying in a housing society (Takshila) in Andheri (E) but later quit that company, and became an independent consultant. I continued to live in the same housing society (Takshila) but in a different flat that I rented.]

Not very long after this I decided to move back to Dombivli, in Thane district (Maharashtra), on the outskirts of Mumbai, where we (my mother & I) and others of my family (brother & family) & friends circle lived, prior to mother and me moving to the company flat in Andheri (E), Mumbai.

After resettling in Dombivli I decided to look around for any Sathya Sai devotee group in Dombivli (this would be around 1993-94 if I recall correctly). I had no knowledge of the Sathya Sai organization and did not know that there are official Samithis as venues/platforms for devotees to gather and conduct Sathya Sai organization/movement activities. [These were pre-Internet search engine days. Yahoo search started as small directory index to the world wide web in 1994, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Yahoo!, and Google came on to the web scene a few years after Yahoo, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Google.]

One day, in one of the commercial buildings close to Dombivli Railway station, I found a board having the name Sathya Sai associated with a Blood Bank. I went up there, came to know that there were regular bhajan sessions on a particular day (I think it was Sunday) and soon I became a part of that friendly and welcoming community which was being led by a medical doctor (a specialist - pediatrician, in fact) who was also leading the Sathya Sai blood bank charitable activity. This doctor, who I will refer to as D, was quite a charismatic personality besides his quite towering intellectual stature within that group which was quite a small but well-knit group maybe of around ten to twenty regulars.

Over time (some months, if I recall correctly) I came to know that this group was a parallel/splinter group and that there was an official Sai organization samithi as well in Dombivli. Destiny had taken me first to a parallel/rebel Sathya Sai group! Eventually I started attending both groups. The official samithi group was much bigger (maybe around hundred members then) and had many rules and regulations to be followed (quite naturally as it was part of a big Sathya Sai organization). The splinter group led by D was more dynamic in terms of the service activities it accomplished with a small group of regulars. However, over time, I came to know that D, the leader of the splinter group, claimed some sort of spiritual type powers/insight especially in terms of healing. Further he recommended that people need not visit Puttaparthi as Swami was everywhere (this was in the early-to-mid-1990s when Swami was quite active in his physical body). In other words, D was like a spiritual leader with some claimed mystical powers, who also was a practicing pediatrician (the bhajan sessions would be held in his clinic waiting room on Sundays, if I recall correctly, when the clinic was closed for his medical practice work). And most of the members in D's group looked up to him as a spiritual Guru (with some healing & other powers) kind of person.

I very much wanted to have Darshan of Swami in physical form, and there were many in the official samithi who were very encouraging of that and even offered to take me along. Further the samithi offered a chance to do Prasanthi Seva where, at the end of the Seva offering, we got the chance of having Swami walk amongst us allowing Seva Dal (us) to take Padanamaskar (reverentially touch his holy feet). Eventually

there was a personal incident I had with D which led to me, politely and peacefully, parting ways from his group after which I concentrated only on the official Samithi events.

A former student (Sai Manickam) of the Sai university (SSSIHL) Prasanthi Nilayam (Puttaparthi) campus, who along with his long-time Sathya Sai devotee parents, provided me lot of information and guidance about Swami and the Sai organization, took me along with him for my first (remembered) darshan of Swami in Brindavan (Whitefield, Bangalore ashram) maybe in 1993-94. (I say remembered darshan as my elder sister (elder to me by 10 years) told me that our family had had darshan of Swami in a public meeting in Bombay/Mumbai when I was a child (must have been in the 1960s) - I have no memory of that as I would have been a toddler then.) This first remembered darshan of Bhagavan had a very strong and positive impact on me. During our visit, Swami attended a function in the Whitefield college auditorium (or some building like that). The former Sai student who was knowledgeable about Swami's typical routine in such visits, positioned me and himself outside and below a balcony/sit-out of this building at around first floor level (if I recall correctly). He said there is a good chance that Swami may come to the balcony/sit-out and give Darshan to devotees assembled outside. Swami did come to the balcony/sit-out and I was thrilled to have a long eye-to-eye contact with Swami from a distance of around twenty or thirty feet perhaps (if I recall correctly). I have a clear memory of that first long eye-to-eye contact I had with Swami even to this day. Somehow that made a deep impression on me.

BTW I had got into a fair bit of meditation and deep prayer with my Ishta Devata (favourite God) being Lord Krishna, perhaps a year or so prior to me getting exposed to Sathya Sai Baba through Sai literature.

This first darshans trip led to strengthening of my faith in Bhagavan and also the Sathya Sai organization which eventually resulted in me moving to Puttaparthi in Oct. 2002 and being given the wonderful and blessed opportunity to serve Swami as Honorary Staff/Honorary Faculty/Visiting Faculty from Jan. 2003 to March 2012 in SSSIHL Prasanthi Nilayam (Puttaparthi) campus. This service gave me the blessed and rare good fortune to receive, at physical body level, Swami's Grace in general and his spiritual guidance through his discourses and, very importantly for me, through his looks & gestures during the regular darshans I would have of him.

I am very grateful to this former Sai student, Sai Manickam, and his long-time Sai devotee parents for the wonderful exposure they gave to me of Bhagavan and the Sai organization, which was an important step in bringing me directly to the lotus feet of the physical form of our beloved Bhagavan.

Today, with the passage of around two decades, I have a far more emotionally balanced view of the Dombivli splinter group matter (though I must say that some conflicting views of the two groups did confuse and disturb me a lot then as I was a novice to the Sathya Sai movement). Now I am grateful to D (who sadly, I was informed, passed away some years ago) and his group who were my first exposure to congregational Sathya

Sai bhajan singing and congregational Sathya Sai service activities. They gave me a lot of encouragement and were very polite towards me even when I decided to stop participating in their activities. I have only good wishes and prayers for their happiness, towards them.

I also am of the view now that it is not uncommon for energetic and inspired individuals to break away from an official spiritual group and start a new splinter spiritual group. Even Mother Teresa essentially parted ways (with permission from church authorities) from her original Christian convent to form a new organization which eventually made a great impact worldwide. The important thing is that the parallel organizations should not fight each other and have turf wars. Give people the choice to go to whatever group they want. I think Dombivli samithi as well as the splinter group did an overall pretty good job in co-existing peacefully, even if there were some reports of criticisms hurled at each other by leaders of the two groups at times. I mean, it was just verbal or written criticism, nothing really serious like a police complaint, lawsuit or violence of any kind. In fact, sometimes, to some members at least, it was an entertaining diversion 😊.

Then there was another interesting and controversial happening in Dombivli samithi. This dealt with the claimed manifestation of vibhuti on Swami's photos in a devotee and samithi member's house as well as letter responses claimed to be from Swami. Devotees would place letters at the altar in this devotee's home (devotee is referred to as X) and some of them (a few, I was told IIRC) would receive written responses from Swami later on (next day/next few days, I guess). This was a sensation! This controversy too got handled quite well in

Dombivli samithi, I feel. The leaders ensured that samithi events were top priority and so long as X did not hold events at his house that clashed with samithi events, he was free to hold the events and samithi members were free to attend those events. X himself would attend samithi events including bhajans where he was a lead singer. The samithi did not publicize the claimed happenings in X's home in any way and its leaders, when their advice was sought on the claimed letter responses from Bhagavan matter, said something to the effect that the organization view is that Swami does not interact with devotees in this fashion.

But, as far as I can recall, they did not go to the extent of publicly criticizing those devotees who chose to believe in the claimed letter responses received in X's home though they surely would have publicly announced in the samithi quoting from Bhagavan's public discourses and statements which strongly discouraged devotees from believing in such claimed responses from Bhagavan. However, such announcements would have limited impact on those devotees who were caught up in the new sensation ☺. I should also mention that, as far as I know, there was no written material or any organized publicity by X (or others) of the claimed letter responses from Bhagavan - it was mainly a word-of-mouth spread sensation. Had there been any organized publicity of these claimed letter responses from Bhagavan appearing in X's home, I am quite sure that the samithi leaders would have pointedly and publicly criticized it.

At that time I did not know X very well. However, I felt that I simply did not know enough to believe in the letter responses part or to deny it. I preferred to go by the organization view

and did not give much importance to the claimed letter responses. But I respected the choice of some devotees to believe those letter responses. Again, their life, their choice, was my view. Over the years I came to know X much better. I think his devotion/Bhakti was and is very deep. I have been more inclined towards the spiritual philosophy part of Advaita (as mentioned in the Upanishads) and the Bhagavad Gita from a very young age (including during my adult agnostic days as it was an intellectual sort-of view not needing faith in an interventionist God). Devotion and faith in a God who responds to prayer and intervenes in human affairs (interventionist God) was something that I started developing much later on in life. I tried to strengthen my devotion and faith by learning from/observing the faith of others in the Sathya Sai samithi as well as other theists in general (like a Christian neighbour of mine in Dombivli).

My view now is that X's deep devotion may have resulted in some paranormal events in his home then. I certainly will not say that such events are not possible. Somewhere down the line, I believe, these occurrences in X's home either stopped or he stopped letting people know about it.

--- end extracts from my blog post ---

Given below are some extracts from my blog post: Simple living in Prasanthi Nilayam (Puttaparthi) Ashram Sheds/Halls; Seva Dal experience,

<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2015/10/simple-living-in-prasanthi-nilayam.html>, Oct. 2015.

[Above link has a pic of "Common halls for Sai devotees as Prasanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi" which readers may want to see.]

I have used these facilities when I used to come to Prasanthi Nilayam as Seva Dal in the second half of the 90s (sometimes the Seva Dal building would not be free till the first/second day of the Seva)! For me, it was wonderful exposure to simple living from a sadhaka perspective. It gave me the confidence that I could slip out of the rather cushy software techie life, and be able to lead this sadhaka type life, at least for a week. The camaraderie and general brotherly attitude in the Seva Dal group staying in such facilities was also encouraging. Of course, sometimes there would be some issues, but nothing really serious. Over time, that prepared me for making the move to Puttaparthi in Oct. 2002.

I am deeply grateful to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba for enabling me to benefit from such a wonderful ashram and a system where people leading regular worldly lives can take a week off and live the simple spiritual sadhaka serving society life in Prasanthi Nilayam. Nothing like doing Seva Dal duty to get your ego battered, no matter who you are in regular life outside :-). Essentially you become just another person in the Seva Dal force serving the ashram, with nobody really caring or knowing what your status in regular life is. That battering eventually helps you not get too caught up in the ego trap.

--- end extracts from blog post ---

Dombivli citizen

During this period I also matured as a citizen of Dombivli. As an owner of an apartment flat, I had to participate in our building/housing society meetings and had to use quite some effort to dodge taking on office-bearer kind of responsibility. That exposed me to housing society issues. As I limited my work time and spent not-insignificant time doing community service via the Sathya Sai samithi, I got exposed to some Dombivli town/city problems and came to know to some extent of the offices responsible for handling those problems. I understood the power that elected representatives to Dombivli municipal corporation and higher representatives like MLA have, and how some representatives use the money and power to good effect. Our social service work sometimes brought us into view of the local politicians and I saw how our samithi office bearers had to tread carefully to stay neutral and avoid getting into any political turf war problems. While I preferred to keep a low profile, over time I had become a responsible citizen who some youngsters and others from the samithi and elsewhere looked upto. It was quite a different role from that of my young happy-go-lucky software developer/engineer days.

Mother's health slipping

Slowly and steadily my mother's health started sliding down. Taking her to the doctor, admitting her to a hospital sometimes, and interacting with doctors for her care became a very important part of my life. It was tough for me initially as I had to postpone my work. She would say she is not feeling well in the morning and that would mean that I have to take

her to the doctor and skip going to work that day - I tried to squeeze in some work at home but sometimes that did not work out well enough. I think I used to get irritated by it sometimes. Mother would catch the irritation - after all she was my mother 😊. I would then feel bad about having got irritated. I also was somewhat strict with her as her health started slipping as I felt that if she managed lifestyle issues better her health problems would not be so bad. One big issue with her was obesity. I tried hard to get her to walk around in the society compound. She tried to some extent but not as much as was needed for her to lose weight. Maybe I should have been a little more understanding and less strict about some lifestyle aspects of my mother.

As I was wrestling with the challenges of being the primary care-giver of my mother when her health started slipping, I learned a fantastic lesson from a teaching I read in Sai literature in Puttaparthi ashram, "Duty without love is deplorable; Duty with love is desirable; Love without duty is divine". It was like a tight slap across my face. I realized that I was somewhere between the first and second phrases of the teaching. I looked upon my service to my mother more as a duty than an act of love. Yes I did love her, of course, but I looked upon serving her more as duty, and was proud that I was doing my duty.

What I needed to do to make my service more spiritual was to increase my love for her so that the act of service flows from love without any need for the notion of duty coming in. I resolved to try hard to change my attitude towards this service. I read about great acts of service done to parents by figures like Pundalik who made God wait outside the door on a brick

(the god Vitthal) as he was busy serving his parents. Over time I think I was able to get to a stage between the second and third phrases of the teaching. When mother said she was unwell rather than getting irritated I looked upon it as an opportunity to lovingly serve her by taking her to the doctor/hospital.

I got rather well acquainted with the doctors treating my mother and the staff at the hospitals where she had to be admitted at times. Time goes slowly when one is waiting for a doctor or giving company to a patient admitted to a hospital. I learned to do spiritual practices like Japa (chanting) while I was in the Doctor's waiting room or hospital. I also became far more observant about life around me. Earlier I did not have much time for such observation.

In Feb. 1999, my mother's health took a turn for the worse. The cardiologist, who was her regular specialist doctor too, at the Dombivli hospital where we had admitted her, suggested moving her to Raymond's hospital in Thane. We shifted her late at night/very early morning. Early morning at Raymond's hospital one of the consultant doctors took me aside and told me that it was a case of multiple organ failure. At that hospital, he said, they had machines to keep her clinically alive for longer but his advice was to avoid that. The doctor was a South Indian (Tamilan IIRC) and perhaps was able to relate to me more easily and therefore gave me the frank advice. I digested that as well as I could. Later another consultant doctor spoke to me of the seriousness of the situation. I asked to see her in the ICU and was permitted to do so. She had tubes all over her, and perhaps knew that her time to give up this body had come. She looked at me and spoke with a lot of difficulty, in Tamil,

"Nee enna nanna paathai, da!" (You looked after me well, da!; da is used in Tamil to refer to somebody younger and close to one). Later I was very pleased that she felt she had been looked after well. It has been one of the greatest certificates of achievement of my life.

I don't recall exactly the conversation between the second consultant doctor and me. But I think I gave my verbal consent in some fashion when he mentioned that she is in a really bad way and it is better to let her go without trying to keep her clinically alive using fancy machines. I think I did not tell him about the first consultant doctor's conversation with me – that perhaps led him (the second consultant doctor) to be a little surprised when I did not question him much. I should have handled it a little better by communicating to him the earlier conversation with the other doctor.

Sometime towards the afternoon, IIRC, she passed away in the ICU. Today I feel that somebody passing in the ICU is not a great way to go. It would have been more human for her and us, for her to have been surrounded by her loved ones as she passed away. Among Sathya Sai devotees I was told that the recommended practice is to sing Bhajans around the dying person so that his/her last moments are sanctified by the Divine name. But then perhaps ICU care is medically appropriate and in today's rush rush age people may not have the time to sit around a dying person singing Bhajans waiting for the final moment to come.

I wondered how much the bill would be as it was a corporate class hospital and I did not have cashless medical policy for my mother or me, though I had a reimbursement type New

India Assurance Mediclaim policy with some limited coverage. It turned out to be not so high - less than fifteen thousand. That money eventually got reimbursed from the Mediclaim policy too. But the thoughts about costs of hospitalization in a corporate hospital like Raymonds for an independent software consultant type of person like me without company covered family insurance, clearly hit me then. I wonder how it would be for others who are not covered by company family insurance or individual/family cashless insurance - maybe they can't even consider admitting their loved ones to such a corporate hospital. They perhaps make do with whatever facilities are provided by their town (like Dombivli) hospitals which are orders of magnitude less expensive than corporate hospitals. Coming to terms with very expensive medical care for complicated illnesses is a brutal reality bite for many lower middle class people of India, I think.

My mother showed great courage in meeting the challenges she had to face to raise the family especially after my father passed away. She was friendly with people and adjusted to difficult circumstances. Perhaps the difficulties that she had to face made her easily empathize with the difficulties others had. That endeared her to many people. These qualities of hers, I think, was vital for us as a family unit to survive the great financial and other hardships we faced, especially after my father passed away. She was very devoted to our religious practices and had great faith in God.

For all the tough financial problems she had to face for most of her life after marriage, after she started living with me in Andheri and then back in Dombivli, she was free from

financial problems and had a fair bit of peace. I ensured that her family pension money would reach her when needed and that was her money to be spent as she wished. She used it to shower small gifts to people who came to her. I think she really enjoyed that ☺. Once we were back in Dombivli from around end 1993 to Feb. 1999 she had, IMHO, a rather contented semi-retired (from housework) and then fully-retired life. She also got into reading/hearing about Sathya Sai and showed great interest in knowing about him. We used to sometimes sing Bhajans together at home - just mother and I - even if the Bhajans were not really melodious ☺, it sanctified the home atmosphere. I think the last years of her life were rather happy years.

Feb. 1999 - Sept. 2002: Saving Retirement Money; Preparing for ashram life

Mother's funeral and related ceremonies (Feb. 1999) went off well. Most of our extended family in and around Mumbai attended and so did the Sai samithi people of Dombivli. Those of the ceremonies that are to be held at home were held in my elder brother's house in Dombivli - a slightly larger place than my small flat. As is customary in our tradition, the ceremonies wound up on the 13th day after my mother's passing away.

My routine changed dramatically. Mother care had been a very important part of my life. Now there was a huge hole. At times, grief would come. I balanced myself between two attitudes - one was the spiritual Jnana attitude that only mother's body had passed away and that her soul+samskaras body would still be around or have got merged in Almighty God. The other attitude was a very human one allowing the grief and memories of mother to flood me and let time do the healing. Over time the memories became pleasant memories with the grief dropping away.

I was between 36 and 37 years old. What should I do now in life? The poor digestion problem was continuing to harass me but I had learned to accept it as part of my life and manage the problem using some medication and some amount of diet control. I had the option now of focusing back on my software career, even shifting to software-wise hot cities like Bangalore. I re-confirmed with myself that my real interest was the spiritual track. The logical step was to try to intensify those

efforts by shifting to a spiritual centre. Some more thought and discussions with close relatives and friends led me to take a more practical view of the matter. What if things don't work out well when I move to a spiritual centre? Can I get back to my profession and Dombivli or other city life? Why don't I save some decent retirement fund money first and then consider moving to a spiritual centre/ashram? My savings at that point of time were not great as I had worked limited hours and had significant amount of expenses to take care of home and mother.

Many years ago I had read about somebody (from Western Europe or USA, IIRC) shooting for a target of retiring from commercial work at 40. That idea had appealed to me then. Now I realized I could shoot for such a target. Save retirement money for a simple ceiling-on-material-desires, rural India lower middle class, bachelor spiritual aspirant (*sadhaka*) life, till I reach the age of 40 years, and then retire to an ashram! That seemed to make good sense and became my plan.

I tried living alone in my flat but that did not work out, especially the regular cooking of food bit. My brother and family (sister-in-law and niece) very graciously invited me to stay with them (in Dombivli itself, close to my flat) and I accepted it. That gave me a regular family setting and solved food issues.

I increased my working hours from a max of 120 hours to a max. of 160 hours. That increased my earnings. I thought a lot about the retirement plan. I had experienced that the stock market and even mutual funds market had a lot of volatility, no matter what their advertisements claimed. I felt it made sense

to invest in them only if one was willing to spend time studying the market and keeping tabs on it. As I wanted to have a financial base which did not need me to study stock market and industry performance analysis and predictions, I decided to go for single premium insurance annuity plans, bank fixed deposits, Public Provident Fund (PPF) and Post Office deposits (higher interest rate than banks then) as the mainstays of my retirement plan. To take care of inflation, I staggered the maturity dates of the single premium annuity plans. I prepared an Excel workbook with various what-if scenarios and that workbook became my main retirement financial plan document. I viewed and updated it several times over the course of the next few years. Excel spreadsheet is really an awesome tool for such financial calculations and projections.

Move to Continuum, an Indian company with business ties to a Dutch start-up company CelPro

In July 2001 I parted ways amicably with Mastek and moved to a small Indian company called Continuum Technologies Pvt. Ltd. in SEEPZ which had strong business ties with a small Dutch start-up company called CelPro. The financial offer was significantly higher than what I was making in Mastek and I felt it will help me achieve a sounder retirement kitty before Oct. 2002 when I turned 40 years old - my retirement deadline. To avoid stress issues of a start-up I clearly told M, the Dutch founder of the small Dutch company, a former Vice President of Baan Info Systems who was handling its India operations, that I would be playing only a technical consultant role and steer clear from management matters. Management was to be handled by another chap who was quite younger than me who I

am referring to as D. Most of my reporting would be to M. I would also be interacting with another tech. guy in Holland.

Barring the (lack of) managerial stress part, it was quite like getting back to start-up Boshu Technics days. This time around I even had the keys of the unit as my timings were from close to afternoon to late evening when I would have to lock the unit up! (At Boshu we had a couple of administration persons who would take care of these matters). The work was ASP.Net, C# business application stuff. The idea was to develop an application framework which would enable easy creation of business applications on .Net and C# (of a particular type). We had to start with recruitment (like Boshu Technics) of youngsters. I limited myself to tech. consultant role and did not really decide how we advertised or let people know about job opportunities. We recruited a couple of freshers. [We did have one or two other persons of middling level experience join us later but one of them quit in a short period of time.]

I learned C#, ASP.Net and prepared a path for the freshers to learn. Later, mainly using the freshers as developers, with me playing the specifications and design role, we developed a small application framework.

Our team in Continuum then delivered a customized project solution to a Dutch customer of CelPro using this application framework. Note that the achievement of delivering latest Microsoft .Net technology based solutions to Netherlands market by our newly formed Continuum team was a significant one.

M ensured that all our salaries/consultancy charges were paid on time and in full! That was a very good thing as sometimes startup companies struggle on this front.

So we were able to create a small but I think quite happy group of developers in Continuum Technologies office in SEEPZ, Mumbai, with CelPro being the main international customer of Continuum.

M was always polite and well behaved - a decent and good man. So it was a pleasure and privilege to work with M.

Towards the end of my stint in CelPro, M politely informed me that due to some financial limitations, we will have to part ways one month prior to agreed date i.e. end of Aug. 2002 instead of end of Sept. 2002. My senior level salary/consultant charges and the financial limitations faced by the company, did not give M an option to continue with my services till end Sept. 2002. I took it in a very business-like way and did not feel bad about it in any way. I had already achieved the retirement fund financial target that I was shooting for. Ending our engagement one month prior to plan gave me an additional month for planning my move to an ashram. M asked the manager person, D, to organize a send off. It was quite a nice send off where I interacted with the team and tried to give them encouragement for the road ahead.

The friend who had put me in touch with M initially, called up to ask about the matter and was even sorry that things were ending this way - I explained to him that it was no problem at all. Word had got out quickly and other offers started coming

in but I felt a month of planning for a new life is more important than some more money earned.

I am grateful to M and other colleagues and friends in Continuum and CelPro for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning all their names. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any Continuum colleague and CelPro staff who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

I believe that CelPro eventually morphed into a new company that has a much bigger team in India and services the international market. I believe that M has been a leading player in this new company. I am very happy to know of this and wish that company all the very best. I am very happy to see this business and people interaction over close to two decades, if not more, between Netherlands and India through software companies M has been leading. I hope that such business tie-ups and people-to-people contact between Netherlands and India continues to grow.

Given below is a compressed pic of the experience letter from Continuum/CelPro. Note that I was associated with an Indian company called Continuum Technologies as senior technical consultant (not employee), and in that capacity I interacted with CelPro staff.

Larger versions of this pic and of other such letters can be seen here: Documenting my part auto bio with pics - computer software industry appreciation and experience letters,



30 august 2002

CelPro Group BV
PO Box 149
3770 AC Barneveld
tel: +31 (0) 342 405 895
fax: +31 (0) 342 405 896
e-mail: info@celpro.nl
bank.nr. ABN AMRO Barneveld: 5638.78.431
KvK.nr.: 08093305

To whom it may concern,

EXPERIENCE LETTER

Our ref : RI/MV
Subject : Experience Letter for Mr. Ravi S. Iyer

Dear Sirs,

This is to certify that Mr. Ravi S. Iyer was associated with our organization via Continuum Technologies Pvt. Ltd. from July 2001 to August 2002 as a Senior Technical Consultant.

He has left us on his own accord, and we wish him all the best.

Yours faithfully,
Celpro Group BV

M. Verhoeve

Director

Family Life

Living with my brother's family was a back to regular family life kind of thing for me. Now that I had moved to my brother & family's flat, I was back into regular world life including TV. Note that I had lived a no TV life for at least around 5 years. I think I would have felt that I should now blend in, at least to some extent, with my brother & family's life. So I started seeing some of the regular TV shows and cricket matches that were popular, when I was at home and was free. But I could not handle regularly watching Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi ☺ (a then superhit Indian (TV) soap opera, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyunki_Saas_Bhi_Kabhi_Bahu_Thi, whose title means: Because mother-in-law was also once daughter-in-law, and covers life in a large Hindu Gujarathi joint family which seemed to include fair bit of intrigue and jealousy). My sister-in-law's sisters and brother (with their families) were all based in Dombivli and living quite nearby. So it was a kind of extended family and I became a part of that family. There used to be outings every once in a while which I joined in at times and enjoyed. My niece was growing up and IIRC had started going to junior college in Dombivli. I was playing the role of Chithappa (younger uncle) to her and enjoyed playing that role. It was a happy period from around say March 1999 to Sept. 2002 that I was with them.

I think I was doing work largely in the office during that time and not working much from home. But I had a PC in one of the rooms of my brother's house and would use it during my free time at home, more as a personal PC and sometimes for small Sathya Sai samithi documentation work, than for office/business work. I think I did spend a lot of time on my

retirement financial planning Excel worksheet on that home PC, during those years ☺.

The extended family (of my sister-in-law) was religious and had all the traditional Brahmin functions. My brother and sister-in-law additionally got into Ayyappa Bhakthi and became important organizing members of a local Ayyappa samithi. Brother would wear the Mala (spiritual necklace), observe the vrath (or whatever it is called in the Ayyappa group; vrath is a period of abstinence from some indulgences) and go to Sabarimala. I was astonished to see such change in him. He too and all my extended family members had been astonished when I turned so strongly towards the Sathya Sai Baba movement.

I enjoyed the exposure to the Ayyappa samithi and found it interesting to positively compare (as against odiously compare) it with the Sathya Sai samithi in Dombivli - two different flowers in the garden of devotion to the Lord. My immediate family treated Sri Sathya Sai Baba and my involvement with his organization with respect but were not and still (in April 2019) are not 'devotees' of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

I think it is part of life in India that as one grows older, especially when one approaches 40s (in my case it happened in my early 30s), and starts facing some tough challenges in life, the cultural ambiance is such that many, many people take to the devotional path seriously. The holy land (Punya Bhoomi) of India is suffused with devotion to God. So whenever a Hindu resident of India is ready to turn to God, there is an absolute plethora of Hindu spiritual groups/congregations that he/she can explore to see which suits him/her, and I think this

applies to most, if not the whole, of India. I think the same would be the case for Muslim, Christian and Jain communities in India. I do not know enough about other religious communities in India like the Parsis (Zorastrians), Buddhists, Jews etc. to say anything about the number of their spiritual groups/congregations.

I should also mention that I have been blessed with a hug by the hugging saint of India, Mata Amritanandamayi, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mata_Amritanandamayi, in the 1990s or early 2000s at a hospice run by her organization in Badlapur (Thane district, Maharashtra), IIRC. I also had another Darshan of her later, in the same period, at her Nerul, Navi Mumbai ashram, IIRC. I have read some of her works on Vedanta and my recollection is that what she says is very similar to, or even same as, what Bhagavan has said on it.

When I was being hugged by Mata Amritanandamayi, IIRC, I whispered Hare Krishna in her ear (and said nothing else), and as we were disengaging from the hug, she looked at me and laughed in a very happy way. That, for me, has been a cherished shared moment with Mata. In my darshans of Mata, I felt that she has a spiritually very powerful, loving and noble presence.

I also interacted more with my sister and her family. My sister is the eldest sibling and I looked upon her as a wise and balanced advisor. She gave the practical view on my plans and insisted on achieving financial independence of some sort before I moved to ashram life. Her practical advice was very useful for me to do proper planning of my ashram move, especially the financial planning part. I had had many

interactions with my nephew (sister's son) earlier but I think during this period he either was very busy with his engineering studies in Mumbai or had already moved to the US for his MS studies. My brother-in-law did not object seriously to my plans. Perhaps he did not want to discourage me by asking me too many questions about such a decision.

I am grateful to my many friends and relatives including my sister-in-law's mother, brothers, sister and their families in Dombivli for the love and friendship I received from them and I thank them profusely for that. My apologies to them for not mentioning their names. Naming them will mean that I need to name all to prevent any Dombivli friend or relative who might read this book, feeling bad if his/her name is not mentioned. But mentioning too many names will bore readers of the book!

My elder brother passed away in February 2017. Given below are some extracts from my blog post: My late elder brother - Vishwanath S. Iyer (Rajamani),
<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2017/03/my-late-elder-brother-vishwanath-s-iyer.html>, 7th March 2017

He was a very loving man who would get along with everybody and was much loved. He will surely be missed by many.

He was a keen devotee of Lord Ayyappa (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayyappan>) and has made the pilgrimage to Sabarimala, Kerala, many times. He also was a key office bearer in an Ayyappa Seva samithi in Dombivli for many years, which used to conduct annual community Ayyappa pujas (worship).

I pray to Lord Ayyappa to shower His Grace on the soul (incorporeal essence of a being) of my elder brother, and give courage and strength to his family members including me to cope with this loss.

Jai Sairam!

--- end extracts from my blog post ---

Preparation for ashram life

I continued to be active in the Sathya Sai samithi in Dombivli. But I chose to focus on preparation for ashram life and so withdrew from some engagements. I also stopped the half-yearly Seva visits to Puttaparthi. I was not sure when I did turn to ashram life, whether Puttaparthi would be the right place for me. Puttaparthi was more of a mission centre - I was very drawn towards meditation and understanding of mystical scripture like Upanishads, and not so interested in becoming a missionary.

I had switched to a new dentist, Dr. N, when my brother and family, including me now, shifted from Dombivli (E) to Dombivli (W). Over time he came to know of my interests in spirituality and my plans to try to see if Puttaparthi ashram would be right for my spiritual ashram needs. He, a Maharashtrian Hindu, was himself involved with some Maharashtrian Hindu spiritual group in his youth and had some unhappy experiences there. He told me that spiritual groups are more bothered about their mission goals rather than spiritual growth of participants in the spiritual group! He spoke with a lot of feeling - perhaps he had felt betrayed by the group he had associated with. I had to convince him that I understood

his concern and that if I do settle down in Puttaparthi I will focus on my spiritual growth without getting too involved in the mission of Sathya Sai Baba. [That attitude of mine changed (attitude of not getting too involved in Sathya Sai mission) after I was won over by the love including some tough love that I needed, of Sathya Sai towards me, especially in 2010-2011.] He (Dombivli dentist, Dr. N) got somewhat pacified by that statement from me ☺. I was touched by his very genuine concern about me getting caught up in something without realizing its full impact.

As the deadline of Oct. 2002 approached, I started cutting down on my creature comforts. I still had the small ownership flat (Nav-Chetan, Dombivli (E)). I did not want to sell it till I was sure that ashram life was suitable for me. If it turned out to be unsuitable I wanted to have a return-path back to Dombivli with a flat to fall back on. I got rid of a lot of stuff that I felt was not necessary. I distributed most of my spiritual books to the Samithi youth with only a few kept aside to be taken along with me to Puttaparthi.

Over email (and perhaps phone) from Dombivli, I was able to establish contact with a gentleman associated with a group in Puttaparthi ashram that did digital recording and broadcasting work. They showed some interest in my offer of software development/consultancy services. So even before going to Puttaparthi I had a potential service activity possibility in the ashram setup. I sought advice from some Maharashtra Sai organization top people I knew, including its president. The state president gave me a recommendation letter - that was an important thing to establish my good character and intentions.

I created a suitable bio-data and application for Service opportunities in Puttaparthi.

I used September 2002 free period to leisurely organize myself for this big move. I also met many friends and relatives in Mumbai to say goodbye to them. Some wondered what's wrong with me - a software industry colleague talked about wasting my talents. But some appreciated my intentions - most knew of my spiritual inclinations and perhaps felt this was a logical step. Samithi people were sad at my leaving but happy that I was going to Swami's (physical) abode. Some asked why I could not pursue deeper spiritual efforts while living in Dombivli? Was it really necessary to go and live in an ashram setup? I had felt that Dombivli life had fair bit of worldly stuff (quite naturally) and that if I shift to a spiritual centre focused on spiritual progress, it would help me progress faster. Besides there may be possibility of getting to interact with Swami or other spiritual masters if I have to move to some other ashram. Such interactions may be extremely useful to me. IIRC, I provided a watered-down version of this view to the questioners so that they did not feel offended.

I took lot of instructions from my Ayurvedic doctor about how to handle my digestion problem while in Puttaparthi. He said he could send my regular medicines by courier but refused to disclose some secret ingredients of his medicine! But he was a kind man and very appreciative of my spiritual quest.

The day for departure came. I think I had packed all essentials into a suitcase and a 'VIP' overnight kind-of bag. I was sent off with lots of love from my family, family friends and samithi people. When I boarded the train to go to Dharmavaram, at

Kalyan (an important railway junction station close to Dombivli), I was feeling a little weak due to digestion problems and having to carry even the two pieces of luggage. Maybe I was rather stressed. Anyway I got on-board the train and said my goodbyes as the train eased out of Kalyan station. I prayed to Swami for a good outcome. I was very excited at finally having reached this stage when I was embarking on a 'full-time' spiritual quest, and remembered many of the wonderful accounts I had read of Hindu spiritual seekers. But I also wondered what destiny had in store for me. Would Puttaparthi be the right place for me or would I have to seek some other ashram? Will my digestion problem be manageable without the regular Ayurvedic medicines and family doctor(s) available to me in Dombivli and Mumbai? But anyway I was a single free sadhaka (spiritual aspirant) now - these issues were minor. The vital part was whether I would have an interesting and fruitful spiritual journey. I was taking, for this ashram phase as a serious sadhaka, the first steps towards God and hoped and prayed that God will take some steps towards me.

Epilogue

At some point in future, I hope to write other parts of this autobiography, and perhaps expand some sections of this part of the autobiography too. But, frankly, I do not know when I will do that.

Appendix 1: Partial or full contents of some relevant blog posts

Given below are partial or full contents of some blog posts of mine which are directly or indirectly relevant to this autobiography book.

Need for haves to do some direct service of the have-nots, for social harmony,

<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2014/11/need-for-haves-to-do-some-direct.html>, Nov. 2014

In a mail exchange, a correspondent mentioned (includes a small later clarification from correspondent), "a small distance can separate a poor area (like a slum) from a wealthy area, yet people can live for years in the wealthy area without ever seeing a poor area." To this I (Ravi) add, or rather elaborate: without ever spending time in that poor area and understanding the challenges of living in that poor area (slum).

I agree on the comments of the correspondent about living in a wealthy area without ever seeing a poor area. I think it is a great problem which exacerbates the rich/poor disconnect and which perhaps is a big factor contributing to social tension and strife, whether the country be a materially developing one like India or a materially developed one like USA. My experience in a spiritual organization with a lot of focus on service to the poor (Sathya Sai Seva Samithi), for nearly a decade, while I was in working in the software industry in Mumbai (around 1993/94 to 2002), was that its weekly or fortnightly service activities for the very poor in the slums and elsewhere, not

only helped the better off in the spiritual organization have some understanding of the challenges faced by the very poor, but also the understanding of how essentially human both the very poor and the better off are. It helped in establishing a connect/common bond between the very poor and the better off. I think such efforts are greatly appreciated by the poor and it contributes to reducing social tension. Instead of a spiritual organization doing such stuff, it could be a non-faith-based NGO. But the essential point is human interaction between the better off and the poor, with the poor being served by the better off, even if it is just once in a fortnight for a few hours. Government welfare schemes, even if they deliver some money/services to the poor, cannot create this human bond in the community between the haves and the have-nots.

In this context I should also mention that my first exposure to such social service was in a non-faith-based environment, when I was a Physics undergraduate in Mumbai's Ruia college, <http://www.ruiacollege.edu/> (in the early 80s when I was in my late teens/early twenties). The Indian academic system then had, and perhaps even now has, a special scheme called National Service Scheme which encouraged college students to participate in it, and provided some sort of academic credit for participation. From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Service_Scheme, "The National Service Scheme (NSS) is an Indian government-sponsored public service program conducted by the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports of the Government of India. Popularly known as NSS, the scheme was launched in Gandhiji's Centenary year, 1969. Aimed at developing student's personality through community service, NSS is a

voluntary association of young people in Colleges, Universities and at +2 level working for a campus-community linkage. The cardinal principle of the NSS programme is that it is organised by the students themselves, and both students and teachers through their combined participation in community service, get a sense of involvement in the tasks of nation building."

I have fond memories of my interactions via NSS with rural India, with health related activities in slums, with a school focusing on specially-abled children (deaf and/or dumb children), family planning related efforts of Indian government then ... Even though my family at that time was facing quite some economic challenges and I was having only enough pocket money to get by, it was clear to me that I was far better off than many others in my city (Mumbai) and country.

I think the world at large i.e. countries of all types: under-developed, developing and developed countries, should have more of such human contact between haves and have-nots where the haves serve the have-nots, even if it is a once-a-month kind of affair.

--- end blog post contents ---

The first notable/remembered exposure I had to Shirdi Sai Baba via Amar Akbar Anthony film song, <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2015/12/the-first-notableremembered-exposure-i.html>, Dec. 2015. Some extracts (slightly edited) from the post are given below:

I was born and brought up in Bombay/Mumbai. Hindi films (Bollywood) and songs were an intrinsic part of my youth and adult life, though I was more into listening to Hindi film songs than seeing Hindi films. [In those days, 70s to 90s say, most Hindi songs were part of Hindi films. Separate music albums unconnected to a film were quite rare.]

The themes of 70s & 80s Hindi films were usually very healthy and promoting good values in general. I mean, typically the good guy & gal will win over evil at the end.

Amar Akbar Anthony,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amar_Akbar_Anthony, was a mega starrer and superhit of the late 70s.

Inter-faith harmony was a very important theme of the movie with the name of the movie itself being composed of popular Hindu (Amar), Muslim (Akbar) and Christian (Anthony) names and being the names of the three heroes of the film. I recall that there was great excitement when the movie was released (1977). I would have seen it in that year or next year and so I probably would have been in my ninth or tenth standard in school in Bandra (East), Mumbai at that time.

I thoroughly enjoyed the movie then and still have fond memories of some parts of it. Amitabh Bachchan did a great role as Anthony Gonsalves. Amitabh sings a humorous song in the movie, 'My name is Anthony Gonsalves'. Some weeks ago I heard a Kashmiri shop guy (named Akbar, if I got that right) in Puttaparthi singing it! That's how popular this movie and its songs were and, to some extent, still are.

Now this film has a song on Shirdi Sai Baba sung in the movie by Rishi Kapoor playing the role of Qawwali singer, Akbar Allahabadi (the playback singer is Mohd. Rafi, another great singer of Hindi filmworld who has given me great joy over the years & decades). I think this film's song was the first big exposure that I had to Shirdi Sai Baba. I mean, I would surely have seen photos of Shirdi Sai Baba earlier somewhere as Bombay/Mumbai has many, many Shirdi Sai devotee families (Shirdi is quite close to Mumbai). But then there are so many Hindu, Muslim & Christian icons that one sees in everyday life in Mumbai, that I don't think any Shirdi Sai photo/icon made such an impact on me at that time, for me to remember it today.

This song became quite a hit. Today, as I look back on my childhood and young adult days, I think it is this movie's song that really made me aware of the figure of Shirdi Sai Baba, a (Muslim) fakir and a miracle man. But I don't think I got into Shirdi Sai Baba devotion then. [Years later in the early 90s, I first developed faith in Sathya Sai Baba and had his darshan. It was after Sathya Sai Baba's darshan that I went to have Shirdi Sai Baba (samadhi & idol) darshan at Shirdi! My elder brother used to visit Shirdi with his friends in the 80s itself I think (if not the late 70s itself) but at that time I was not too interested to join him. I guess the divine call had not really come to me, at that time.]

However, I enjoyed this song and it was quite a favourite of mine. The song has the mother of Akbar who is singing, fleeing from villains. The mother had lost her eyesight and the song shows the miracle of her eyesight getting restored (besides the smaller incident/miracle of a snake preventing the

villains from pursuing the mother into the temple). Note that Akbar does not know that the lady is his mother (as the children got separated from their parents at a young age due to some treachery; many Hindi films have emotionally very complex plots :-)).

Do enjoy the song if you have not heard it before, or even if you have heard it before. I think later I will try to either find an English translation of the lyrics or provide my own. 5 min 37 secs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPwS1UOSSM4>.

--- end extracts from blog post ---

The shock & trauma of watching a loved one battle the dreaded disease, Cancer,

<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-shock-trauma-of-watching-loved-one.html>, Feb. 2016. Contents of this blog post are given below:

I came across a private Facebook post on my wall today which was about the damage cancer and its treatment can do to a person's body and which was seen by the post author happening to a loved one. I thought I should share the two comments (slightly edited) I made on the private post as the comments by itself may be of interest to some readers.

I wrote:

Well, I went through that experience in the early 1990s in Mumbai when a close relative of mine went through that shock of diagnosis and then chemotherapy. I was there in the hospital on many occasions at the side of this dear close relative of mine, including the meeting with the oncologist-surgeon at

Tata memorial hospital, Mumbai, after the first operation (and only operation, if I recall correctly) when he told us that it was stage 2 of the disease and not the initial stage as we had hoped. ... And, you know what, she changed her lifestyle, stopped worrying about so many things that one has to face in life, and beat the disease, and is now leading a fairly normal life. So, all the best wishes for your dear one who is going through that experience as well as to you and the other loved ones & care givers who are going through this rather traumatic experience. BTW this experience that I went through, watching this middle aged close relative of mine go through (who was a medical doctor herself) the diagnosis of this dreaded disease and then chemo treatment, was a significant event in my life which turned me very strongly towards the spiritual, including a quest for a Guru which led me to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Jai Sairam!

...

I wrote:

I think one of ways of defeating the scare of cancer disease, is for people to write about the challenges of confronting it with current medical treatment (chemotherapy), and even if a loved one is lost in the battle, write about the experience of loved ones coming together to help the person fight the tough battle. In my case, some of our loved ones who got together to help the close relative, bonded much closer. Further, there is something about such battles which drives home how human we all are, and perhaps what really matters is how the loved ones got together and gave back the love received, in the form of care giving to the ailing person.

--- end extracts of blog post ---

One is Lucky if one's mind is fed up of worldly objects; Sannyaasa Yogam (good fortune to be a renunciant), <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2015/06/one-is-lucky-if-ones-mind-is-fed-up-of.html>, June 2015. Some extracts (slightly edited) from this blog post are given below:

In a Facebook post the following quote (and an accompanying photo) of Siddarameshwar Maharaj, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddharameshwar>, (I do not know of him) was provided: "Consider yourself lucky if your mind becomes fed up with worldly objects. The 'Goddess of Sensuality' is very fond of human sacrifice, and she likes it fried alive!"

I made the following comments (slightly edited) on the post:

Terrific! Vairaagya or Vairaagyam (detachment) does not come easy, the wise say. Some knowledgeable people even say that, many times, Vairaagyam in a person is due to previous birth activities/efforts. BTW, did you know of the term, 'sannyaasa yogam', used by Indian astrologers? Roughly translated it means the 'good fortune to be a renunciant'. I know of one case where a loving female relative took the traditional Hindu, South Indian style, horoscope of a male relative of hers, who was not yet married, to a South Indian astrologer asking about his marriage prospects. The astrologer studied the horoscope and said something to the effect: Marriage for this man? There must be some mistake as he has 'sannyaasa yogam'. True to the astrologer's prediction the man stayed unmarried (he is in his 50's now and still

unmarried). *[Ravi update for this book: The male relative is me ☺.]*

In the traditional Indian context, the biggest thing in life, when it comes to attachment to the world, is marriage. Many times, the Indian Hindu male marries for family reasons - to take care of elders, even for very prosaic stuff like food being cooked at home, and the home being taken care of. In course of time, usually, children arrive, and the male is well and truly into 'grihastaashrama' (family householder mode of life), and is expected to follow grihastaashrama dharma (code of conduct for the householder as laid down in Hindu scripture and as interpreted by Hindu religious heads/community heads; though this is in quite an informal setting as Hinduism is not that strongly organized a religion as say Islam or Christianity). I think that it is a pretty good system. BTW I expect it to be somewhat similar for other religion males in traditional India - like Muslims and Christians, but there would be some variance. I am not writing about the females part as I prefer to leave it to Hindu females to write about it.

Fascinatingly, in some traditional Hindu marriages there is a kind of warning issued to the male, prior to him getting married, as part of the marriage ritual itself. In South Indian Tamil Iyer marriage rituals (which I have seen many times as I come from that group) the man, prior to the marriage getting solemnised, acts as if he is going on a pilgrimage trip to Kaashi (Varanasi)! From

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iyer_wedding#Kashi_Yatra (link is broken now in April 2019): "The groom is dressed in the

traditional “Panchakatcham” veshti. He also holds an umbrella, a fan, a walking stick, and a towel containing dhal and rice tied to his shoulder. He then sets off on a mock pilgrimage to pursue further religious studies, and renounce worldly pursuits. As he steps out of the wedding hall, the bride's father intervenes and advocates for the superiority of married life to an ascetic life. He also promises to give his daughter as companion to face the challenges of life. The groom accepts and returns to the mandapam to get married. The umbrella is to remain with the groom, to remind him in the future of this advice."

[Additional point not in my FB post comment: I always viewed the Kaashi Yatra ritual in these Iyer weddings as a clear sign that the elders and the wise in the community, have great respect for those who choose to pursue religious efforts/religious studies further and renounce worldly pursuits, and that those who took to that life were not only to be respected and revered, but were also lucky to have escaped 'samsaara saagaraa' (the difficult sea/ocean of worldly life). But it was also understood that very, very few would actually be able to do it (i.e. most would get married). Now as a 50+ years old guy, I feel that it is truly wonderful that through this Kashi Yatra Iyer wedding ritual, the elders of that community have beautifully and subtly conveyed to youngsters, a comparison between renunciant life and married life.]

---end blog post extracts---

A discussion about plight of homeless & suffering in Los Angeles, Mumbai/Bangalore and

Puttaparthi, <http://ravisier.blogspot.com/2015/07/a-discussion-about-plight-of-homeless.html>, July 2015. Some extracts (slightly edited) from this post are given below:

In response to a Facebook post giving a link to the article, How Los Angeles Is Becoming a 'Third World' City, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/06/opinion/welcome-to-hooverville-california.html>, dated July 6th 2015, there were some comment exchanges of which I have given below selected ones (slightly edited):

Ravi S. Iyer wrote:

Very sad. I had read similar articles and seen a few videos about it some time back. Another point is that being homeless and poor in L.A. may be actually tougher than being homeless and poor in, say, Mumbai. Somehow the desperately poor can sleep somewhere and somehow exist in Mumbai (my city for most of the first four decades of my life) - the police cannot be very rough with them, especially if a group of people get together and somehow form a small set of hutments. Of course, hygiene wise Mumbai slums typically are really terrible. But then at least the human can somehow squeeze out a place to lie down. The police in L.A. would be forced to be tough with the homeless, and perhaps drive them out of the city. I have seen some terrible videos about such homeless guys even getting violent with the police who are driving them away. I mean, where will these homeless go? They are human beings, not animals! One thing I am so happy about Puttaparthi and surrounding villages is that even if hygiene and

other aspects may not be great, homeless persons somehow survive. They find some place to lie down; beg their way for food; and exist. They are not driven out of the town & villages. ... Yes, if the number of such homeless people becomes too much, there may be a problem. But, so far, I am so happy to see that even the desperately poor are not driven away from Puttaparthi. It gives the town that vital HUMAN touch even if it means some hygiene and other issues.

[In response to a commenter saying that (many years ago,) he saw an (apparently) homeless guy lying in the dirt with a look of utter suffering in his eyes, right next to the road in Kadugodi near Bangalore, having a lot of traffic going by]

Ravi S. Iyer wrote:

Sad! This did happen in Mumbai when I was living there. Middle-class (and, of course, upper class) types would get some help. But it was the visibly poor who were lying on the road somewhere whom people, including me, would hesitate to help, as one did not know how much involved in the matter one would get if one helped. I mean, taking a poor person who is possibly unconscious (and sometimes, to be brutally honest, just plain drunk) to even a municipal hospital, has strings attached. You become the care-giver. I think this is where Mother Teresa's organization and similar organizations alone can really render help.

...

In Mumbai (before I moved to Puttaparthi in Oct. 2002), I have helped a middle class stranger who needed to be hospitalized - those were days when cell phones were expensive and so neither I nor another stranger who was helping, had a cell phone. If I recall correctly, we came across the sick person in the late evening at Kanjur Marg Central Railway (suburban) station. The sick person was pleading with us not to take him to the municipal/govt. hospital (as there is some concern about the quality of care rendered there) but the auto driver whose advice we also took, said that in such cases of strangers, municipal hospital is the right hospital as even police may get involved. I mean, after all we were not next-of-kin. So we did get him into a municipal hospital where he got some treatment. I think we took him, based on the advice of the Auto driver, to Rajawadi hospital in Ghatkopar, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajawadi_Hospital. I don't recall exactly now but I think through landline phone he or somebody else at the hospital, contacted his relatives, after which we helper-guys could go home.

Even today if I go to Mumbai, I will do the same for a middle class or upper class guy, but I will hesitate to go that far for the very poor. In the latter case, I may ask him/her whether I can get him/her some food/water/medicine ... but I will not go further and take him/her to the municipal hospital where they will see that it's a very poor person, and will get very upset if I just, so to say, offload the very poor and sick person onto them, and then disappear. I mean, I know I will not be able to follow through for care of the very poor and sickly. These are my limitations and I try to live within my limitations.

BTW this is why people like me, and many, many Indians including atheist-communist leaders like the late Jyoti Basu of Bengal, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyoti_Basu, deeply revered Mother Teresa and her followers. They would do what I and most other Indians would not do. We are humbled into silence and adoration by the awesome service to the very poor & sickly that Mother Teresa and her followers provided (and still provide, I guess) in some parts of India.

--- end extracts of blog post---

Haji Ali Dargah of Mumbai; Qawwali: Piya Haji Ali, <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2016/12/haji-ali-dargah-of-mumbai-qawwali-piya.html>, Dec. 2016. Some extracts from the above post (slightly edited) are given below:

[The blog post has a pic of Haji Ali Dargah, Mumbai. Readers who want to see the pic may please visit the above post. I was hesitant to include the pic in this book due to possible copyright concerns for paperback version of this book.]

Note that this blog post is freely readable by anybody on the Internet and has no commercial angle whatsoever. That is why I have presumed that Haji Ali Dargah will not mind my putting up their photograph on this website. I mean, I would like to popularise it and also express my gratitude for all the Darshans (sights) of Haji Ali Dargah and happiness I have had from Haji Ali Dargah.

Piya Haji Ali,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3KqaNzOxYI>, 5 min 21 secs.

This is a great song about a very dear Muslim shrine in South Mumbai that Muslims as well as many people from other religions, revere. I cherish my memories of so many sights of Haji Ali, typically from one of Mumbai's BEST buses, but sometimes from a taxi, as the bus/taxi would drive along the Chowpatty road next to the sea (Marine Drive). The video clip has a passing glimpse of a red BEST bus and a yellow topped (& black body) Mumbai taxi. I also recall one visit of mine to Haji Ali when I saw & heard a proper Qawwali (live) performance by devout Muslim singers which held me spellbound.

[Prior to that, the Qawwalis that I was exposed to was romantic love affair between male-female type songs in Hindi films. Here's a famous one of them from the late 1970s, Parda hai Parda - Amar Akbar Anthony - Mohammad Rafi, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBEUOZ1-gE>, 8 min 17 secs. The romantic ones were decent time-pass (as we would say in Mumbai). But nowhere close, IMHO, to the soulful and spellbinding power of the real Qawwalis sung about God/Allah. The movie Amar Akbar Anthony also had a devotional Qawwali type song on Shirdi Sai Baba which I liked very much but I don't think that Shirdi Sai Baba song was a proper Qawwali like the one I heard in Haji Ali.

The earlier video link (Piya Haji Ali) is also from a Hindi film, I guess. But the song seems to be a proper Qawwali dedicated to God and Haji Ali.]

--- end extracts from blog post ---

Dehachi Tijori Bhaktichacha Theva - Famous Marathi Bhakti song,

<http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2017/06/dehachi-tijori-bhaktichacha-theva.html>, June 2017. Given below are the blog post contents:

Here's the video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALrZxOPx3DA>, 3 min. 4 secs.

This is a Marathi Bhakti (Devotion) song that I have heard countless times, on radio and perhaps elsewhere too, as I was growing up in Mumbai and in Dombivli (town near Mumbai) (I was born in early 1960s), and has stayed in my mind as one of my favourite Bhakti songs. It is from the Marathi film 'Amhi Jato Amuchya Gava' released in 1968, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aamhi_Jato_Amuchya_Gava. The singer is Sudhir Phadke.

My Marathi is middling type and I am badly out of touch for nearly fifteen years now since I moved to Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh from Maharashtra. So my translations given below of a few lines may have some mistakes.

The song starts with the lines:

"Dehachi tijori bhaktichacha theva

Ughad daar deva aata ughad daar deva".

I would translate that as:

"Keep the valuables-locker of your body for Bhakti only/mainly

Open the door now O God/O Lord, open the door".

Another couple of lines from the song that has stood out for me and been an important message that I viewed as one of my key takeaways from the song, are:

"Swaartha janu bhinti varcha aarsa bilori

Aapuleecha pratima hote aapuleecha bairi"

which I would translate roughly as:

"The mirror on the wall of selfish people is (strange?)

Our own reflections (people) become (opposed?) to us".

I interpreted that as selfish people tend to have selfish family & friends who may turn against them. So being selfish (beyond a reasonable survival-need point) was not good. Today I am very thankful that such melodious and popular songs heard in my youth passed on or reinforced such messages and values in me.

The audio alone can also be heard in this collection of Sudhir Phadke songs with this song being the first,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji4TYrPqJ9o>.

--- end blog post contents ---

When a White Evangelical group in Nashua, New Hampshire, USA in 2nd half of 1980s tried to convert me & my Indian friends to their Christian sect, <http://ravisjyer.blogspot.com/2019/02/when-white-evangelical-group-in-nashua.html>, Feb. 2019. A large extract (slightly edited) from the blog post is given below:

This post is based on a recent mail conversation I had with an Indian Catholic Christian friend and former software industry colleague, who I refer to as George (not his real name). The intent of this post is to improve understanding and harmony between Hindus & Christians. It is NOT the intent of this post to denigrate any religious group/sect.

A few days ago, George wrote me over email about an incident when many of us from our Mumbai software company (Datamatics, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datamatics>) were in Nashua, New Hampshire, USA and nearby places (some in Massachusetts), doing assignments at Wang Labs. Lowell, Mass., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Laboratories. This was in the 2nd half of the 1980s. To help improve our recollection of the event, we also got input from another of our group who was there then.

We were a large group. I don't recall the exact number of us in Wang Labs at the time the event happened. But we would have been at least twenty to thirty persons.

We were put up in nice condominium type apartments by Wang Labs. I think then I (and George) were living in Royal Crest, Nashua, New Hampshire. Here are some pics of Royal Crest Nashua from their website (takes a little time to load):

<https://www.royalcrestnashua.com/en/apartments/photo-gallery.html>.

We seem to have been noticed by a white evangelical Christian group and were invited to an event of theirs. We visited them (2 or 3 carloads of us). I think most of us in the group would have been Hindus but George and maybe one or two other persons were Christians. We did have a few Christians in the total group of at least twenty to thirty persons from Datamatics that was at Wang Labs then.

At the event, we were asked to join in a Christian prayer before meals and which I think most of us would have done. I don't think Hindus in our group then had any issue in joining in prayers of other religions that seek blessings and good from God.

Afterwards they showed us the movie, "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiana_Jones_and_the_Temple_of_Doom, which has parts that savagely mock India and Hindu Indians! Mid-way through the movie some of us left, me being one of the group that left.

George wrote (in the recent mail exchange) that I was absolutely right when I said (at that time) that the movie was a poor choice (for the small event organized by the evangelical group for us) and that the movie lacked sensitivity.

I don't recall what I had said then but I am quite sure I would have been quite offended by the movie and had the view that George said I expressed then.

George wrote that he was told that a few days after we had watched the movie, one of the persons in the evangelical preacher group called me and requested me to give my life to Christ, but that I said no. In Protestant language he meant, would you like to be born again?

I wrote George that I don't recall this exactly but I am quite sure I would have refused and perhaps even given an explanation of why I was refusing. Note that even in the 2nd half of the 1980s, at which time I would have been in my mid-twenties, I had done fair bit of reading of Hindu scripture and philosophy and commentaries on it by Hindu seers including contemporary seers. I was not much into devotion and belief in supernatural power of Hindu deities, but was into Hindu Vedanta and Gita philosophy.

I also had some exposure to Christian scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and had quite a few Indian Christian friends. I had studied for the last 4 years of my schooling, 7th to 10th standard from mid 1975 to mid 1978, in a Christian mission run school - Cardinal Gracias High School in Bandra (East), Mumbai.

Some info. about this school may be appropriate The school website history page, <https://cardinalgraciashighschool.org/about-us/history/>, tells us that the school was started in a church-cum-school in 1961 by Fr. Pereira. It moved to the present premises (same as where I studied in 1970s) in 1963 after the plot was bought by Msgr. Pereira with the help of the late Cardinal Valerian Gracias, then Archbishop of Bombay. From around 1964, Norbertine Fathers from St. Norbert Priory, Jamtara, Jabalpur (Madhya

Pradesh, India), seem to have got associated with the school. Later the "Cardinal invited the Norbertine Father of The Abbey of Berne, Holland, to take over the school as well as the ministerial activities." And in 1967, the parish was handed over to the Norbertine Fathers.

By Christian mission school, I just mean that a Christian mission (in this case the Norbertine Fathers) is responsible for running the school, and do not imply any conversion attempts of any sort.

I should also say that there was no question of my school (Cardinal Gracias High School) converting non-Christian students to Christianity by proselytizing to them. Of my own accord, I did attend a few services in the church next to the school building in the same compound but that's it. Nobody attempted to convert me or, as far as I know, my other non-Christian school mates to Christianity. I think non-Christians, mostly Hindus, were the majority in my class, and perhaps the school as a whole.

Coming back to the attempt of the white evangelical group in USA to convert me/us in the 1980s to their Christian (Protestant) sect, while I was very respectful of the Christian faith in general as well as various Christian sects, there was ***no way*** I could be enticed into giving up my Hindu faith and converting to the Christian faith or that particular Christian sect's faith!

George also said that the white evangelical Christians consider Indians to be heathen and so this group tried to convert us to

their Christian sect. George added that they do not consider white non-Christians as heathen.

My view is that I think there are a great variety of evangelical Christians (Protestants) of various denominations in the USA. Some of them may surely have a poor view of the culture and religious traditions of non-white people (black or brown).

And then there are the fundamentalist variety who have the strong belief that those who do not believe in Christ and Christ ***ALONE*** as the saviour, will suffer the terrible fate of burning in Hell for eternity.

But there are many USA Christian denominations which are NOT so fundamentalist. I don't know whether all evangelical Christian denominations can be viewed as fundamentalist. I have met quite a few USA Christians and also read the works of many USA Christians. A lot of them are far more knowledgeable about India and Indian cultural and religious traditions than what is portrayed in Steven Spielberg's Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom!!!

I am very respectful of the faith of many Christian sects in the USA. I may not accept some of their views - e.g. the belief that I as a Hindu am destined to burn in hell for eternity unless I accept only Christ as the saviour. I, perhaps somewhat condescendingly, view that as spiritual ignorance on part of those evangelical and other Christians who hold such beliefs. As these Christians ***do not force*** their belief on me like has been the case in past eras for various religions and religious sects, I do not get perturbed by their having such a belief. I mean, we live and let live.

But I do find some of the other teachings and practices of evangelical Christians to be very inspirational. This includes perhaps the most famous USA pastor of the 2nd half of the 20th century - the late Billy Graham, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Graham. I am not in favour of/not supportive of Graham's "crusades" in India (in the past) aiming to convert Indians to his brand of Christianity but I do marvel at his deep faith and the great efforts he made to spread faith in Christ (God).

I should also say that in general I am against aggressive proselytization of any religion/sect. But I support the right of anybody in India to choose to follow a different religion/sect if he/she, of their own free-will without any coercion or any material inducements, wants to follow/convert to a different religion/sect.

George wrote that at that time in Nashua, he used to read his small Gideon's Bible daily, but every time his Hindu flatmate and Datamatics Mumbai software company colleague would enter his room, George would hurriedly put it away. George's Hindu flatmate told him that he shouldn't do that.

I think George shared the above to show how his Hindu flatmate was encouraging George to freely worship as per his Christian faith.

I wrote George that he may like this post of mine: Radhanath Swami and Father Francis Clooney : Encountering God- Hindu and Christian Perspectives - Columbia university, 2012; Father Clooney makes brief mention of keeping Sai Baba vibhuti in

his office, <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2018/01/radhanath-swami-and-father-francis.html>, 11th Jan. 2018

George wrote that for sometime after he left Datamatics and was working in Chicago (USA), he went to a white evangelical church. It had a group for young adults. George wrote that he has fond memories of that group and still keeps in touch with them though twenty one years have passed. It was the best Christian group that he had been to. Note that George now is based in India.

I wrote George that it was good to know the above.

George wrote that his evangelical Christian friends (in Chicago) used to tell him to listen to Christian FM stations. One Pastor used to advertise for his church on the radio and in his ad he used to call the people living in Africa, the 'heathen'.

I wrote: Heathen and Pagan are the terms that one comes across often in evangelical Christian literature when it comes to people of non-Abrahamic religious faiths. Here's the wiki page for Paganism, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paganism>, if you want to have a look.

Many Christians that I know in the USA and in Europe do not accept such views, and so I am comfortable interacting with them on Facebook and elsewhere. Unfortunately, some "fundamentalist" religious leaders of various faiths present a negative view of religions other than their own. But leaders like Pope Francis do not use such disparaging terms for people from other religions including non-Abrahamic religions like Hinduism. I very much appreciate such positive attitude from Pope Francis towards people from non-Christian religions.

=====

George had a look at above post contents and responded:
"Thank you. It is excellent."

--- end blog post extracts ---

Why I was very happy to see US President Obama as Chief Guest at India's Republic Day function,

<http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2015/01/very-happy-to-see-us-president-obama-as.html>, 26th Jan. 2015. Given below are some extracts (slightly edited) from the blog post:

I saw the entire Indian Republic Day function on TV today morning. Somehow I felt very happy to see US president Barack Obama and US First Lady Michelle Obama being the chief guests at this function,

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/obama-soaks-in-republic-day-spectacle-gives-thumbs-up-for-bsf-s-motorcycle-stuntmen/article1-1310778.aspx>. The reports are that the crowd at the event too was very happy to have them there.

I wondered why it was that I was so happy about them being chief guests. So here is some slightly long analysis of that:

I became an adult (18 years) in 1980 around which time I think I was able to get some idea about India's relations with other countries, both from a people-to-people point of view, and from a country-to-country point of view, based on media reports and what I would hear in my circle of family & friends. At that time (1980), I think India had an odd relationship with

USA. India's great friend was the Soviet Union, especially on the military front. Diplomatically, India was supposed to be Non-Aligned and so not favouring Soviet Union or USA. But, it seems to me, the military closeness with Soviet Union, and the fact that USA had military ties with a country that India had fought three declared wars with, the last declared war being in 1971, made the relationship with USA, at a country-to-country level, a not-so-comfortable one.

But even in 1980 (in Mumbai where I lived then), the people to people contacts between USA & India were not insignificant, with me knowing of a few, only a few, people who were known to somebody known to me (so second-hand), who had migrated to (settled down) in the USA. USA was the go-to land for the well educated middle-class in India as it provided a great material life without big problems like violent racism (at least in the places the well educated Indians settled down in). In contrast, I did not know of anybody who had migrated to the Soviet Union! Neither did I know of anybody who was actively considering going to the Soviet Union for higher studies or for work. So the Soviet Union was a great friend of India but people-to-people contact between Soviet Union and India was not known within my circle of family & friends (in Mumbai).

Another big factor for book loving people like me then, was the vast number of books written in English by American authors or non-American authors who wrote about America, both fiction & non-fiction, which were easily available in libraries (bookshops were too expensive for cash-strapped students like me then). I must have read tons of such books over the late 70s and 80s, from authors like James Truslow

Adams (The Epic of America, <http://www.amazon.com/Epic-America-James-Truslow-Adams/dp/1931541337>), Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, to Mark Twain to Robert Prisig (Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance), Joseph Heller (Catch-22) to Issac Asimov (Foundation Trilogy), Douglas Adams (Hitchhiker's guide to the Galaxy) to Arthur Hailey, Robert Ludlum, James Hadley Chase, Mario Puzo (Godfather), Louis L'Amour etc. besides some poetry of Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe and others. Through these books I got a decent idea about the USA. Then there were Archie and other American comics, and, of course, Hollywood movies. The comics were easily accessible through the private libraries. Hollywood movies, as a student, required some effort & money as one had to go to South Bombay/Mumbai (upper class Mumbai) where the movies were screened. Once I started working, they became a lot more accessible/affordable but time was an issue. I must also mention that working-class Mumbai & surrounding areas where I lived (Bandra (E) in Mumbai, and later, Dombivli) in the late 70s and 80s did have theatres showing English movies as a single morning show though these typically were not the latest movies. I did see a lot of Hollywood movies then (80s) on Sunday morning, as Sunday was my off day (besides two Saturdays a month, if I recall correctly).

In marked contrast, as I (and most Indians) did not know Russian, I could read only Russian books translated to English, which in comparison to American books, were typically not available in private libraries. College libraries though did have some technical books translated from Russian to English, if I recall correctly, besides having works of great Russian authors

like Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky & Chekov, some of which I did read.

In the mid-80s (1984) I started my software industry career as a trainee programmer in a company in Bombay (Datamatics Consultants). Almost all the important books and almost all the action related to important innovations in software, at least in my software technical areas, were happening in the USA! I have read tons of software books and technical manuals written by Americans!

In the second half of the 80s I made two trips to America involving a total stay of around one and three quarter years in the USA. That gave me direct experience of America, and I have very fond memories of my stay there. Further, in the second half of the 80s, even when I was in India I was doing a lot of software development work involving US customers, and so had interactions with them.

My experience above would be somewhat similar to the experience of many educated middle-class Indians during the late 70s and 80s, especially educated middle-class Indians living in the big cities of India like Bombay/Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras (Chennai now).

I think another factor in the 70s & 80s is the belief that political rulers of India seemed to have in the socialist model being suitable for India and not the capitalist model of the USA. My memory is not very clear on this but I think a picture seems to have been painted by the political and media powers in India then that USA (capitalist) companies were only interested in maximizing their profit and not really bothered

about helping people, and so should not be trusted. I think I too came under that impression to some extent prior to me getting direct exposure to USA software companies after I got into the software industry. [Today my view is that yes, capitalist companies, including the many Indian capitalist companies in existence now, are out to maximize profits but they do provide valuable/useful products & services and these companies can be regulated to ensure that their profit frenzy does not harm people at large through laws like anti-monopoly and unfair trade practices laws. The socialist model in Indian environment tends to create bureaucratic setups which are inefficient and not innovative. So an optimally regulated capitalist/free market model is, IMHO, decidedly superior to the socialist model for Indian environment.]

So, in the 70s & 80s, though Soviet Russia was India's great friend, and India-USA relationship as countries was not very good, many educated Indians got drawn to the USA.

Then the dissolution of the Soviet Union happened in December 1991,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_Soviet_Union

. A little before that in the same year (1991), India faced a huge economic crisis,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Indian_economic_crisis.

India could make its way out of that crisis only through IMF help which came with conditions for economic reform (move to more free market model, I presume). So the early 90s seems to have been a very tough and game-changing period for India, in terms of its economic model and its relationship with Russia. India moved closer towards a free-market model and so got closer to USA in terms of the economic environment.

Soviet Union ceased to exist and the new states of erstwhile Soviet Union, including Russia, were going through a great churn.

I think this early 90s period is when India as a country started moving closer to USA. The relationship with Russia continued on military hardware but without becoming a block to relations with USA.

Over the years, from the early 90s to today (early 2015), the people-to-people contact between USA and India seems to have grown by leaps and bounds, along with the Indian-American community in the USA having acquired a significant influence in the USA political sphere. Country-to-country relationship between USA & India also seems to have grown significantly during this period.

[About India's current relations to Russia, I am of the view that Russia is a time-tested and so trusted and great friend of India. India should continue to reciprocate this friendship with Russia. Better relationship with USA should not mean that India's friendship with Russia reduces. BTW I should add that as I now live in a spiritual town (for over a decade now), I have interacted with Russians & Americans who live in the same town (Puttaparthi, India). We are able to largely co-exist peacefully ☺.]

Today, in January 2015, for the first time, a US president was the chief guest for India's Republic Day function. I think that is a clear indicator of how close India and the USA have come, from the 70s and 80s period that I described earlier. As democracies and former colonies of Britain (though the

independence from colonial power is separated by close to two centuries), both countries have a lot in common, even if, from material progress point of view, there is a vast gulf between USA and India today. Also, as US president Obama said in his joint presser with Indian PM Modi yesterday, the India-US relationship getting closer is a reflection of the people of the USA and India having got closer.

From <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2925437/Modi-Obama-announce-nuclear-breakthrough-talks.html>:

"In addition to a personal friendship, we are also reflecting the warmth and affection between the Indian people and American people," said Obama.

"It's not surprising that we have a friendship because hopefully we are reflecting the values of our peoples."

--- end short extract from dailymail ---

So in my life I have grown close to USA and its people over these decades, and I think that would be the case with many, many educated and even not-so-educated Indians. Therefore it was truly fitting, and a very happy event for me, to have this closeness between many in India and many in the USA reflected by having US President Barack Obama and US First Lady Michelle Obama as the chief guests at India's Republic Day function.

Another reason for me being very happy with it relates to how Barack Obama has embraced people of various races and cultures, over the years of his US presidency. Many of his

speeches on world platforms are world statesman-like speeches. He and the US first lady being African-Americans/blacks makes it more special. No offense meant to USA whites or other races, at all. I have had the privilege of having very good relations with many USA white people, and have great regard for them (and for other USA non-white people even though I have not had any significant interactions with them, so far).

But the current US presidential couple comes from a race that has been discriminated against quite badly in the past in the USA. Indians came under European colonial power rule for around one and a half centuries (two centuries for some parts of India), and so were quite badly discriminated against by the European colonial power then. That the chief guest for India's Republic Day function was not only the US presidential couple, but a couple who overcame the history of discrimination to rise to this top level, was great satisfaction for an Indian like me, as we Indians too have had to fight our way to material success and position overcoming the history of discrimination and suppression. It was an icing in the cake that the Indian counterpart to the US president, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi, himself rose from a humble tea-seller position to the top post in India. I think Narendra Modi & Barack Obama being the top two democratically elected leaders gracing India's Republic Day function is a great triumph of twenty-first century democracy as it demonstrates its ability to allow determined & talented political leaders to rise to top positions from any section of society.

Hope my explanation for why I was very happy today about the Obamas being chief guests at India's R-Day function was not too long ☺.

=====

An update on Jan. 30th 2015

Yesterday's The Hindu carried this article, The new entente with the U.S., <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-new-entente-with-the-us/article6831127.ece>, by Amitabh Mattoo, a Professor of Disarmament and Diplomacy, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

--- end extracts from blog post ---

Photo and message about Dr. Manmohan Singh presenting famous 1991 liberalization budget,
<http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2015/07/photo-and-message-about-dr-manmohan.html>, 26th July 2015. Given below are the contents of this blog post:

My comment on a Facebook photo & message about Dr. Manmohan Singh presenting his famous budget on 24th July 1991 that liberalized the Indian economy,
<https://www.facebook.com/logical.indian/photos/a.430765593719832.1073741828.426895610773497/758589374270784/?type=1&theater>, is given below.

Thank you so much, Dr. Manmohan Singh. My generation who had started our IT careers in the mid 80s, greatly benefited from your steering of Indian economy from the very scary days of 1991 to prosperity which middle class India had not seen at least for a few centuries. I pray to Almighty God to

shower His Grace on you and your team, including former PM P.V. Narasimha Rao garu, who made this almost miraculous turn-around possible.

--- end blog post contents ---

**How Russia helped India by blocking USA
Seventh Fleet in 1971 Bangladesh liberation war;
Nixon-Kissinger discussions on the war,**
<http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2015/09/how-russia-helped-india-fend-off-usa.html>, 16th Sept. 2015. Given below are relevant extract(s) (slightly edited) from this blog post:

In December 1971, I was nine years old living in Bombay (now Mumbai) in a Ground+6 stories set of buildings in Dadar (East) area of Mumbai (Central Railway Officers' Quarters, Dadar. My father was then an Accounts officer in Central Railway). If I recall correctly, we lived on the fourth floor (the building had a lift), and we had to put brown paper on glass window panes and be prepared to switch off all lights if the air raid siren went off. The fear then was that Pakistani war planes could attack and bomb Bombay. At that time, these four or five Ground+Six stories buildings, clustered together, would have been standing out among the rest of the much lesser in height (two or three storied) buildings around it in Dadar. Further, the vital railway tracks of Central Railway connecting Bombay to a large part of India were next to the buildings (Bombay also has a Western Railway which connects some parts of Western India to Bombay). So if these buildings and the railway tracks could be spotted by Pakistani fighter jets during a night time raid, they would have been an attractive target for them to

bomb. But no Pakistani fighter jet ever made it that far to Bombay, during that war, if memory serves me right.

Then, of course, India's great friend was the USSR. As the linked article below shows [*please visit above blog post link to see the referenced linked article*], the USSR stood by India, in its time of need, and neutralized plans by USA Seventh Fleet (ordered by then USA president Richard Nixon) and UK to muscle into that war, and force India to back off from its objective of helping to resolve the refugee crisis and liberate Bangladesh and stop the genocide there.

That was nearly forty five years ago! Today, India has great friendship with USA. I personally have lived in the USA for a total of nearly two years in the second half of the eighties and early nineties, and have very fond memories of USA. I have nothing but goodwill for the people of the USA, and have many contacts & friends among USA citizens both of Indian (India of South Asia) origin and of non-Indian origin. But India should never forget the great hand of friendship that Russia provided her during her decades of need. Ideally India should be very friendly both with USA and Russia.

--- end blog post extracts ---

Dr. Manmohan Singh on the days, 25 years ago, when India was pulled back from economic disaster and put on path to economic recovery, <http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2016/07/dr-manmohan-singh-on-days-25-years-ago.html>, 4th July 2016. Given below are extract(s) (slightly edited) from this blog post:

IMHO, a must read interview for all Indians (is given below), where Dr. Manmohan Singh talks about the days, a quarter century ago, when he, then the Union (federal) Finance minister, with the all important political backing of then Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, pulled India back from the brink of economic disaster and put her on the road to not only economic recovery but a period of stunning economic and social growth.

The article also presents comparative data, 25 years ago (mostly) and now (mostly), on macro stability indicators (e.g. deficit/GDP), size/composition of the Indian economy (e.g. GDP growth), The changed Indian general (e.g. telephone subscribers, foreign remittance) and social indicators (e.g. below poverty line rate, literacy rate).

A few indicators of great interest to me:

* Indian economy has grown 6.3 times its 1991 size. 1990-91 GDP size was \$326.76 billion. In 2015-16 it was \$2,075.85 billion (over 2 trillion dollars).

* No. 1 export item in 1990-91 was textiles (\$4.34 billion). In 2015-16 it was Software services (\$74.15 billion)

* % below poverty line in 1993-94 was 45.43%. In 2011-12 it was 21.9%.

* Literacy rate in 1991 census was 52.21%. In 2011 census, it was 74.04%

* Under one-year infant mortality (per 1,000 live births) was 80 in 1991. It was 40 in 2013.

25 years on, Manmohan Singh has a regret: In crisis, we act. When it's over, back to status quo,

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/manmohan-singh-opening-indian-economy-1991-economic-reforms-pv-narasimha-rao-rbi-indian-rupee-devaluation-2886876/>, dated July 1st 2016

Ravi: I was a young software professional then (during Indian 1991 economic crisis,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Indian_economic_crisis)

living in Mumbai, with around 7 years of experience under my belt including long assignment stints in Europe & USA. I clearly recall the sense of despondency I and others in Mumbai felt at that time, as India had to send its gold to IMF/World Bank in return for the VITAL help they rendered. What a turnaround Dr. Manmohan Singh and team pushed through despite opposition (the opposition part is talked about in the interview)!

I learned from this interview that Dr. Manmohan Singh was willing to risk his life in serving the country as Finance Minister, at that time of deep crisis! A small extract from the interview where Dr. Singh says, "Well, I came to India soon after a bypass surgery. When the offer came to become finance

minister, my friends advised me not to take it up as it could kill me, they said. So I said, 'how does it matter if I die in the process of serving one's own country, it is alright'."

Many, many thanks, Dr. Manmohan Singh sir, to you and your team for that yeoman service that you all rendered to generations of Indians including me. Your spirit of service to one's fellow people (country, in this case), is truly inspiring!

=====

Update on 31st July 2016

Here's an interesting article: 1991, the untold story by Yashwant Sinha, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/yashwant-sinha-writes-on-25-years-of-reforms-1991-the-untold-story/article8912399.ece>, dated July 29th 2016.

Ravi: Yashwant Sinha was the finance minister in the Janata Dal (opposed to Congress) govt. under Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, prior to the P.V. Narasimha Rao Congress govt. that presented the July 1991 reform budget through its finance minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh.

...

Ravi: According to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._V._Narasimha_Rao, the P.V. Narasimha Rao led govt. started its tenure on 21st June 1991 and ended it on 16th May 1996. Dr. Manmohan Singh, finance minister in the Narasimha Rao govt., presented his reform budget in July 1991.

The article mentioned above (from thehindu.com) gives an alternative view to Dr. Manmohan Singh and his party's view of the July 1991 budget. Yashwant Sinha argues that if his party had continued to be in power instead of the Congress party forming the govt, he would have presented a similar reform budget. He writes, "Fate had intervened and taken away the opportunity from me to present the same Budget that the Congress later presented and won kudos for."

His view is that the previous Congress govt. (previous to 1990) had spent too much resulting in large fiscal deficit and short-term debt. In 1990 the Gulf war caused petroleum prices to go "through the roof" which worsened the situation and resulted in a full-blown financial crisis for the country.

--- end extract(s) from blog post ---

F.C. Kohli, L.S. Kanodia & N. Patni are pioneers of Indian software services export industry,

<http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2017/05/an-enjoyable-short-article-by-shashi.html>, 1st May 2017

Some extracts (slightly edited) from this blog post are given below:

An enjoyable short article by Shashi Tharoor, How being Indian became cool, <http://www.theweek.in/columns/shashi-tharoor/how-being-indian-became-cool.html>, May 2017

Some thoughts of mine and some more info. on this topic:

It is quite extraordinary how a single field of Information Technology (IT) propelled India from what was viewed as a

basket-case economy on the road to self-destruction, to economic boom for the country as a whole!

In India, we now have union (federal) minister for IT, and at state level, ministers for IT too. That itself shows how vital, from economic point of view, the field of IT has been for India over the past few decades.

...

In my considered view, it was well educated technologist businessmen/top-manager entrepreneurship in the field of software services that powered India's IT economic boom story, and not Indian computer scientists.

As I browsed a little on this topic, I came across this book reference, Making IT: The Rise of Asia in High Tech by Henry S. Rowen (Editor), Marguerite Gong Hancock (Editor), & 1 more, <https://www.amazon.com/Making-Rise-Asia-High-Tech/dp/0804753857>, perhaps published in 2006. This book seems to be associated with Stanford project on regions of innovation and entrepreneurship. Its Google Books preview, short url: <http://bit.ly/2UPdCUd> (to see long books.google.co.in url visit the associated blog post link given earlier), shows a list of leading Indian IT companies in 1990 and in 2002.

[With reference to Table 8.4 "Founders' Backgrounds of the Leading Firms" of the book:]

Datamatics is listed in 1990 as no. 4 but does not appear in the 2002 list!

Some more info. about 1990 period's well educated technologist businessmen/top-manager pioneers in India's IT economic boom (not necessarily in order of importance) is given below:

*) Faqir Chand Kohli (Tata Consultancy Services), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F._C._Kohli, "He is frequently referred to as the Father of the Indian Software Industry due to his significant contribution in Indian IT industry. He was the founder and first CEO of Tata Consultancy Services, India's largest software consultancy company."

...

*) Lalit S. Kanodia. [Readers will have to excuse my bias here as the company he founded on his own, Datamatics, was the first company I joined in my software career, as a programmer-trainee with a 3 year bond, in 1984. It is my alma-mater, in a sense, as I was taught programming and system analysis there during a four month intensive training period. I quit the company in 1990. I have had a few personal interactions with Dr Lalit Kanodia though I was a relatively junior guy in the setup.] From

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalit_Surajmal_Kanodia:

Dr. Lalit Kanodia (born March 30, 1941) is an active Indian Business Entrepreneur. He is credited with having created the Software Industry of India as the Founder CEO of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), earlier called Tata Computer Center during 1967-1970. He is currently Chairman of Datamatics Group of Companies which he founded in 1975.

...

*) Narendra Patni. From

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narendra_Patni:

Narendra Patni (1943 – 3 June 2014) was an Indian chief executive officer who founded Patni Computer Systems.

---end wiki extracts ---

Ravi: Other names which followed the path that Kohli, Kanodia and Patni had made as pioneers in Indian software services area especially in the export sector, and came into great business success (as reflected in 2002 list mentioned above) are Narayana Murthy (Infosys), Azim Premji and Ashok Soota (Wipro). But I don't think they can be viewed as pioneers of Indian software services area. In my considered view, Kanodia as tech entrepreneur for TCS and later Datamatics, and Patni are two ****vital**** pioneers of Indian software services industry, especially in the export sector. SEEPZ, Mumbai, <http://www.seepz.gov.in/>, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEEPZ>, was the electronics duty free zone which was the happening place in the 80s for the Indian software services EXPORT industry with all the top companies having their main EXPORT related office there - TCS, Tata Burroughs Limited (offshoot of TCS in a way) which I think got renamed to Tata Infotech later on, Datamatics, Patni Computer Services, Mahindra-BT etc. I had a ring side view of it as I was largely associated with Datamatics, SEEPZ unit from 1984 to 1990 though I did spend nearly 3 years of this period abroad on software projects, and a few months in Datamatics' local software services office in Nariman Point, Mumbai.

...

Ravi: Some additional thoughts of mine on this topic:

On this topic, I am focusing on entrepreneurs some of whom started off with some technical background (though not innovation) in the USA, but who were the vital pioneering contributors to IT software services export growth story in India. Technical innovation was very limited in the (business) pioneering days of Indian IT software services export growth story as top level architecture and design used to be handed down from USA customers. But we learned about design and architecture as we studied such stuff handed down to us, and also read books to back up our understanding, and perhaps in a decade or so from the early 80s when this (business) pioneering work started, we were in a position to offer complete IT solutions from architecture to design to development and support to foreign customers. I was an intimate part of this story and so am speaking from experience about growing from programming work to design to architecture.

I think I should say here that I have read huge number of manuals and books and tech. magazines on computers and software architecture, design and development. As a tech. consultant which is what I became in the latter stages of my 18 year international software industry career, such reading & study were vital for me to keep reasonably up to date on what was going on in the software development field.

However, most of the solutions that I was involved with or came to know of, even in the 1990s (I quit the Indian IT

consultancy work field in Aug. 2002, having started in this field in Mar. 1984 as a trainee programmer), followed Western (primarily USA) innovated architecture & design models/standards e.g. OOAD, n-tier architecture, UML, OSI Networking protocols, distributed n-tier architecture models, COM/DCOM, CORBA

At that time, while some Indian companies may have done some TECHNICAL pioneering work, I had not come to know of ANY SINGLE technical pioneering contribution from any Indian company or academic/non-academic research institution, that had won enough acceptance to get widely known and so be considered for solutions that we offered to foreign clients.

I am not getting into the whys of it here. I am just giving my frank view of the matter from my ring-side view of Indian IT software services business success story in 80s and 90s. That success story which helped Indian economy in a big way, was business entrepreneurship and technical work along well defined industry standards and practices success story but NOT really a technical innovation success story. The lack of technical innovation does not really take away from the Indian software development services success story of that period, IMHO. The technical innovations would happen abroad, typically the USA, and we (including tech. consultants like me) would study and understand the innovations and incorporate it in our software development models/processes.

--- end blog post extracts ---

James Comey on the bully and bullying,

<http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2018/05/james-comey-on-bully-and-bullying.html>, 27th May 2018. Large extract(s) (slightly edited) from this blog post are given below:

Chapter 3 of James Comey's book, 'A Higher Loyalty' is on the bully and bullying. Now James Comey was born in Dec. 1960, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Comey, and so is only around 2 years older to me (I was born in 1962). So I have found accounts of his growing up in a small city called Yonkers in New York which is very close to New York city, and later in New Jersey, Allendale, to be very interesting, and I compared it mentally with my growing up in few parts of Bombay/Mumbai (Dadar and Bandra(East) with fair bit of holidays spent in Chembur/Ghatkopar) and later a town close to Mumbai called Dombivli from where I would commute to Mumbai by (usually crowded) suburban trains for college and later work.

Comey who now is a well built six foot eight inches and so has an imposing physical figure, writes that as a kid he was "anything but imposing"! He studied in Yonkers till he was in fourth or fifth grade and was a well accepted and liked kid in his school. Later his family moved to New Jersey and so he had to join a new school in Allendale, New Jersey in fifth grade. Here he was viewed as an outsider by the other schoolkids who taunted him and physically bullied him. He was knocked down to the ground. He was invited to fist fights in a nearby park which he tried to avoid.

He writes about encountering more bullies in ninth grade. He implies that he was body-slammed into a locker which hurt.

Then he writes about "wedgies". He writes, "If memory serves, a wedgie involved ripping another boy's underwear out of his pants by grabbing the rear waistband of his underwear and yanking upward. The offense typically involved two assailants, and I endured several in the ninth grade."

He writes that he tried to avoid confrontation.

Ravi: My God! I would never have imagined that former FBI Director James Comey had to endure such physical bullying while in school in New Jersey! Yes, I had read about pretty nasty physical level bullying in some USA schools but somehow I thought James Comey's schools would have been different.

Hmm. What a contrast my school life was when it comes to physical or mental bullying! I guess I was on the thinner side even as a boy. I went to English High School in Dadar (East) (now it is no longer there) which was not viewed as among the best schools in the area. I studied there upto 6th standard. Later I attended 7th to 10th standard in Cardinal Gracias High School in Bandra (East) which was viewed as one of the top schools of Bandra (East). Note that there was no hostel in these schools. We used to be based in our homes and attended school during school hours.

In neither school do I recall ever being physically bullied at all! And I cannot recall even being a target for verbal bullying. I don't think I was ever confrontational then and I think if there was a fight kind of situation, I would have chosen to walk away and avoid it. I don't recall any regular physical bullying of anybody else either. Yes, there would have been some

physical fights at times. But not a regular targeted bullying of some students.

I guess my Bombay school experience of no bullying, has been like what Comey experienced in his Yonkers city school (till fourth/fifth grade).

Comey writes that in his college years, from 1978, which were at College of William and Mary (seems to be in Williamsburg, Virginia), he himself joined in bullying another boy by trashing his room and creating problems for him (but not physically assaulting him). Comey writes that he is still ashamed of him having joined in that bullying. He does not say anything about himself being bullied in his college years, and so I presume that he was not himself bullied then.

In my college years (junior college: 11th and 12th standard, and later degree college, from 1978 to 1983), which was in Ruia college in Matunga, and short six month or so period of post-graduate study (M.Sc.) in Khalsa college, Matunga, and Bombay University Kalina campus (second half of 1983), I was aware of some violence during student union elections. But I simply avoided getting involved with such matters. Other than student union elections related violence and disturbances, there would be some verbal taunting, rough jokes etc, especially if some guy was going around with some girl. But that too did not really get into targeted verbal bullying of certain types of students, as far as I could see. And I don't recall any targeted physical bullying of certain types of students at all. But then I did not live in the college hostel. I would attend college during college hours and then go back

home. Perhaps those who lived in the college hostel did face some bullying.

But we heard harrowing tales of ragging involving some physical assault kind of matters too, in some engineering college hostels. Some of the really nastier types of ragging would get reported in the newspapers. At that time, science degrees like the one that I did was possible via non-residential colleges. But most engineering degrees required attendance in residential colleges and so hostel living.

As I never lived in a school or college hostel, I perhaps was spared bullying.

Comey writes that bullies are powerful in groups because it is easier to be a follower. He writes that groups (sometimes) get hijacked by bullies with the loudest voice!

Ravi: It is my experience of spiritual commune/ashram systems and spiritual commune/ashram groups that when the top leadership condones bullying, what Comey writes above becomes true of the commune. But if the top leadership pulls such bullies up when complaints are made against them, then the bullies can be held at bay. The special case is when the founder of a spiritual commune/ashram system dies. In the ensuing power vacuum, it is the loud voices and power mongers who tend to get power, and sometimes a small coterie of powermongers are able to hijack part or whole of the spiritual commune/ashram system.

Comey writes that he developed a lifelong hatred for bullies and sympathy for victims of such bullies. He writes that some

of his most satisfying work as a prosecutor "was putting bullies of all kinds in jail, freeing good people from their tyranny".

I salute James Comey for writing so frankly about his experiences of being bullied in school and himself being a bully (but not physical assault bully) in college in one case (and then repenting deeply for it). I admire and commend Comey for later taking up public prosecution work which targeted bigger bullies who committed crimes (including physical assault crimes) and jailed them, thereby providing relief to good people in the community who were being targeted by these bullies. I pray to God to shower His Grace on James Comey for this public prosecutor work that he did against bullies.

--- end extracts of blog post ---

John Chambers of USA, Cisco chairman emeritus, formerly with Wang Labs., ex US India Business council chairman, is named for Padma Bhushan, third-highest civilian award of India,

<https://ravisjermisc.blogspot.com/2019/01/john-chambers-of-usa-ex-cisco-chairman.html>, 28th Jan. 2019. Some extracts from this blog post are given below:

Today I read an interview of John Chambers in The Hindu: Protectionism has never worked in the long run, says Cisco chair emeritus,

<https://www.thehindu.com/business/protectionism-has-never-worked-in-the-long-run/article26106009.ece>, 27th Jan. 2019. It mentioned that Chambers has been recently named for the Padma Bhushan by the Govt. of India.

...

I am very happy to know that John Chambers has been honoured by the govt. of India in this fashion. I have seen some of his video interviews and talks, and read quite a few text interviews of his, like the above. I get the impression that he is a genuine friend of India, and seems to have significantly contributed to growth of USA India business ties.

I have a soft corner for John Chambers as he was with Wang Labs., Lowell, Massachusetts, USA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Laboratories, during the stints I had with Wang Labs in the second half of the 1980s. But I do not recall coming across his name then. His wiki page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_T._Chambers, states that he joined Wang Labs. in 1983 (when he was 34 years old) and left Wang in 1991 to join Cisco.

He grew to fame as Cisco's CEO catapulting Cisco from tens of millions of dollars revenue company to tens of billions of dollars revenue company known internationally as a networking and telecommunications giant, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cisco_Systems.

I am so happy that a former Wang Labs. man from the USA has been awarded a significant civilian honour by my country, India.

=====

I received a few replies over email, mostly from ex Datamatics colleagues that I had sent the mail to, on this post's contents and one response on Facebook. Some were not aware of John

Chambers' association with Wang Labs. I intend to explore that in another post. Most replies conveyed happiness on knowing about Chambers being named in this award list. Note that the awards are handed out usually in March or April at Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's Mansion) by the President of India.

To see the Padma awardees list, visit <https://padmaawards.gov.in/SelectionGuidelines.aspx>. Click on "2019 Awardees List" to see PDF file with press note dated 25th Jan. 2019. There is no description/citation for the awards mentioned here, though the field is mentioned.

The entry for John Chambers is:

5. Shri John Chambers (Foreigner), Trade & Industry - Technology, USA

John T. Chambers tweet: "It's a tremendous honor to receive the Padma Bhushan award. I've always believed in India & it's been incredible seeing the transition the country has made from slow follower to fast innovator. I'm lucky to be part of this incredible success story.",

<https://twitter.com/JohnTChambers/status/1088901135929233408>, 25th Jan. 2019

I commented (replied) in the above tweet as follows:

Congratulations sir! As an Indian who was associated with Wang Labs., Lowell, MA, USA through the Mumbai company Datamatics in second half of 1980s, I and other former

colleagues of mine are very happy to see an ex Wang Labs USA man get named for this Padma Bhushan award. ...

... A former software labs. student of mine from a deemed university in South India, who served in Cisco India, also is very happy. Thank you sir for your contribution to better USA - India ties.

Cisco's John Chambers Named For Padma Bhushan Award, <https://inc42.com/buzz/ciscos-john-chambers-named-for-padma-bhushan-award/>, dated 26th Jan. 2019

The above article mentions that Chambers has been a vocal supporter of the Indian startup ecosystem, and that he has helped a couple of Indian startups expand to US markets.

I have been reading articles and even viewed videos of his, where he, as a leader of the US India Business Council, has been very supportive of India-USA business ties. As an example of it, here's a relevant 2 year old article: India-US partnership has never been more important: John Chambers, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/india-us-partnership-has-never-been-more-important-john-chambers-2314329.html>, 29th Jan. 2017.

The article quotes Chambers as saying, in the context of a meeting then between US President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "Both governments are deeply committed to creating greater economic opportunity for their citizens" .. "The partnership between the US and India has never been more important".

I have seen pics of Chambers meeting PM Modi in Delhi and elsewhere, shared on PM Modi's and others' social media feed.

Given this background, I think the current Indian government would have felt that Chambers' contribution to India in trade and industry (technology) as well as in improving USA - India business ties, makes him deserving of India's third-highest civilian honour, the Padma Bhushan.

--- end extracts from blog post ---

Some info. on John Chambers and his association with Wang Laboratories, based on Web articles,

<https://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2019/01/some-info-on-john-chambers-and-his.html>, 30th Jan. 2019. Some extracts (slightly edited) from this blog post are given below:

...

First I think I need to explain my interest in John Chambers' association with Wang Laboratories, Lowell, Massachusetts, USA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Laboratories.

It comes from how critical Wang Labs and its Wang VS computers were to the building block years of my software development career. After dropping out of my M.Sc. (Physics), I joined Datamatics Limited in SEEPZ, Bombay (Mumbai), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datamatics>, as a trainee programmer in March 1984. I, and others in my batch, were taught COBOL programming and other stuff like System Analysis for 4 months or so. The practical work of the COBOL programming part was on a Wang minicomputer! That was my first exposure to a computer!

Datamatics had a strong tie-up with Wang Labs. for both onsite work as well as offshore work. I went for a 15 month stint to Wang telecom research centre in Belgium in 1985-86. Later from 1987 to 1989-90, I went to Wang Labs. HQ at Lowell, MA, USA for two stints: one for 7 months and one for around a year. I also handled one offshore Wang Labs. project in Datamatics office in SEEPZ, Bombay. Most of my work in the first 6 years of my software development career, from 1984 to 1990, when I was with Datamatics, was on Wang minicomputers (Wang VS line) or other Wang computers. I have had to study various Wang manuals from Computer Languages related (COBOL, 'C', PL/1, Assembly etc.), Operating System Services, to networking products specifications and design (e.g. Wang VS Videotex and Wang Banyan VINES porting) to Wang OS testing procedures.

See

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Laboratories#The_Wang_VS_computer_line for details about Wang VS computer systems.

Like Wang VS computers was the pre-dominant part of my technology platform expertise from 1984 to 1990, I think it was similar for most of my Datamatics, SEEPZ, Bombay colleagues in the 1980s. We at Datamatics were the Indian Wang software experts. There were some Wang hardware experts too but they were few (and that was not my area). Our company, Datamatics, did onsite and offshore Wang projects across the world - not only Wang HQ and offices but also with Wang customers. USA, Europe, Africa, Middle East (Arab countries) - Datamatics sent its Wang software experts everywhere!

Our technology expertise identification was as software experts on Wang VS computers. And that carried weight with Wang VS customers worldwide.

Wang computers along with other big minicomputer companies like Digital Electronics Corp. (DEC) and Data General (DG) got swept away by the PC (Windows/Unix & Intel/AMD) technological change wave. While it may have taken some years to get completely wiped out, I think it was towards the end of the 80s and early 90s that the writing was on the wall that minicomputers era is getting finished. And that impacted many of us at Datamatics who were Wang experts! We had to jump to other technology platforms to stay relevant! I jumped to the Windows and Unix PC platforms in 1990 (or maybe a little earlier).

From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Laboratories:
"Wang Laboratories filed for bankruptcy protection in August 1992."

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minicomputer> describes how almost every minicomputer company (Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), Data General, Prime, Computervision, Honeywell and Wang Laboratories) declined due to competition from generic Unix servers and Intel-based PCs. It also says that most of these minicomputer companies were based in New England and their decline (closure or getting absorbed into (merger with) a non-minicomputer company) was referred to as the end of the Massachusetts Miracle.

With this background, I would like to share what I have dug up about John Chambers' stint at Wang Labs.

1) Lessons from IBM and Wang: Startups will write next chapter for John Chambers after Cisco,
<https://siliconangle.com/2018/12/06/lessons-ibm-wang-labs-startups-will-write-next-chapter-john-chambers-cisco-guestoftheweek/>, 6th Dec. 2018

The article refers to Wang Labs as Boston based but, to be more precise, it was based in Lowell,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lowell,_Massachusetts, near Boston.

Chambers started his career, after finishing his MBA, as a salesman for IBM in the mid-1970s. In or around 1982, he joined Wang Labs. The article states that in the early 1980s, Wang had become "a major player in the office minicomputer market".

By late 80s, Wang had a focus on (proprietary) hardware instead of software and ignored the rise of PCs. The article implies that this approach was a failure and that Wang filed for bankruptcy protection in 1992. It also implies that other minicomputer companies too which were once thriving in the Route 128 area of Boston were similarly impacted, and they were not thriving anymore.

The article quotes Chambers as saying that they knew they were the Silicon Valley (equivalent) of the world then. But Chambers said, "We failed to make a transition from the minicomputer era to the PC and the internet era. You're a product of your experiences and know the tremendous pain that occurs because Boston's Route 128 is no way near what it used to be."

Around 1991 Chambers quit Wang Labs and joined Cisco in California.

The article links to a 35 minute video which I guess is an interview with Chambers. The article seems to be based on that interview. I have not yet seen the video but plan to do it later.

2) John T. Chambers 1949–,

<https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/biography/A-E/Chambers-John-T-1949.html>

This article states that Chambers had seen a business lecture given by An Wang, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Wang, the Chinese-American computer engineer and inventor who was the founder of Wang Labs. Chambers was impressed with An Wang's lecture. He joined Wang Labs. and was later able to convince An Wang that he (Chambers) was suitable for leading the Asian (Asia market, I presume) sales team for Wang Labs. and seems to have done well. In the early 80s when Chambers joined Wang, it was doing very well with demand being much bigger than sales. Chambers has a lot of respect and affection for An Wang. He is quoted as saying, "The most impressive man I've ever known, other than my father, was An Wang. It was the trust he put in me, that he gave me, the belief he had in me, that I'll never forget".

The article states that when Wang hit hard times in early 90s, Chambers as executive vice-president was forced to lay off five thousand employees. [Ravi: My God! What a horrible thing that would have been for Chambers. During one of my stints in Wang Labs, there was a round of layoffs with one

senior person from the department that I was associated with, being laid off. It was a very sad and also quite tense thing.]

3) Former Cisco CEO John Chambers Is Trying To Change The World,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterhigh/2018/12/03/former-cisco-ceo-john-chambers-is-trying-to-change-the-world/>, 3rd Dec. 2018

The article quotes Chambers as saying, "While Dr. Wang is the smartest man I have ever met, I failed to convince him that the future was around the PC and the Internet." Chambers says that Wang's failure to innovate resulted in big job losses - over thirty thousand!

He then joined Cisco. Cisco "grasped the power of the Internet when most did not even know what it was." Fascinatingly, Chambers says that he would not have taken the risk of joining Cisco had he not seen how IBM and Wang failed to handle market transitions properly. He felt that Cisco had the potential to do big changes to the world (via Internet technology).

[Ravi: The references to Chambers' stint at Wang given above do have some negative aspects as Wang (and other minicomputer companies) went downhill in the late 80s and early 90s. But I think it would be unwise to judge Wang or the other minicomputer companies like DEC, Honeywell, Data General etc. as bad. It was just that the new technology wave of PCs and Windows/Unix becoming so powerful that they were much cheaper and ****effective**** alternatives to proprietary and expensive minicomputers, was not something that could be easily foreseen. Similarly, it was difficult to

foresee in 1990 that the Internet would become such a mighty revolutionary thing in business and in other aspects of life. I mean, in 1990 who would have thought that in less than two decades, there was going to be an awesome free Google Search which will almost instantaneously provide results on any search string matching suitable public Internet pages! And, to bring in a personal experience, who would have thought that an Indian software techie like me in 1990 would be writing blog posts in the 2010s, including this post, which are getting indexed by Google search engine, with some posts being top results for some search strings!

In the late 80s and early 90s, the PC technology change tsunami waves came and established minicomputer companies fell and got wiped out. That's it.]

...

Original Wang Towers buildings in 2011 at which time it was owned by Cross Point:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cross_Point_Towers:_north_east_side;_Lowell,_MA;_2011-09-11.JPG, which is shared under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

This article has a 1992 pic of these towers with the Wang logo on it (before it got sold to other(s)): Pic link: https://video-images.vice.com/_uncategorized/1487693801108-AP_920817011.jpeg and link of article which has the pic: https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/vvxb3/the-great-failure-of-wang-laboratories-the-david-to-ibms-goliath.

A video of Wang Towers from the outside as well as inside, from a "home movie" reportedly made by a Wang employee in the 1980s: WANG Towers | Lowell, Massachusetts, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjVdMe3QqOY>, 2 min. 21 secs. The video also shows office cubicles. I was given one such cubicle during a one year stint there in second half of 1980s. During my other stint at Wang Labs, I did not have a cubicle-office. I worked in the testing lab. (on the ground floor if I recall correctly) and shared a big conference room along with many of my Datamatics colleagues which perhaps could be viewed as our shared office room.

--- end extracts from blog post ---

John Chambers of USA, ex US India Business Council chairman, Cisco chairman emeritus, ex Wang Labs, ex IBM, receives Padma Bhushan award from President Kovind of India, <http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2019/03/john-chambers-of-usa-ex-us-india.html>, 11th March 2019. Some extracts from this post are given below:

Padma Bhushan award being announced and given to John Chambers, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_T._Chambers, by President of India, Shri Ramnath Kovind on 11th March 2019, in the presence of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and senior union cabinet ministers of India, can be seen from around 2 min to around 2 min 40 secs in the video:

Padma Awards presentation ceremony,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84B4iWXmeuY>, around
31 mins, published by Rajya Sabha TV.

...

"President Kovind presents Padma Bhushan to Shri
@JohnTChambers for Trade & Industry (Technology).
Founder of JC2 Ventures, Shri Chambers has served as CEO
of Cisco and as Chairman of the US-India Strategic
Partnership forum.",
<https://twitter.com/rashtrapatibhvn/status/1104998173129490433>, 11th Mar. 2019

...

As somebody who has gained enormously from his association
with Wang Labs. Lowell, MA, USA and Wang ITRC,
Brussels, Belgium, through Datamatics Ltd, Bombay where I
was an employee from 1984 to 1990, I am very happy to see
an ex Wang Labs executive, John Chambers, receive an
important civilian honour, Padma Bhushan, from the President
of my country, India.

Thank you Mr. John Chambers for promoting USA India
business ties.

--- end extracts of blog post ---

My recollection of 9/11 (11th September 2001) terror attacks on USA,

<https://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2019/04/my-recollection-of-911-11th-september.html>, dated 27th April 2019. A large extract from this post is given below:

In September 2001, I was living with my elder brother and family in Dombivli, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dombivli>, a city close to Mumbai (India), from where I would commute by suburban train to Mumbai for my work.

If I recall correctly (IIRC), I was at home (elder brother's flat) when I saw TV reports about one of the Twin Tower buildings of New York City being on fire. Note that the first Twin Tower attack happened at 8:46 AM Eastern Standard Time (US), which would be 6.16 PM (or close to that) in India. IIRC, I was watching CNN broadcast on what was then a big fire (but not yet declared as a terror attack). I think this CNN broadcast would have been either on CNN International channel or on CNN-IBN a sister network of CNN in India.

Then, IIRC, I saw live (or close to live), the second plane going into the second (South) Twin Tower. I could not believe my eyes. This seemed absolutely unbelievable. But it was being replayed on CNN and so I had to accept it as true!

I should say here that I have so many times been watching out for the top of the Twin Towers coming into view as I drove from Massachusetts/New Hampshire down to New York City in the second half of 1980s during my assignment stints in the USA. IIRC I have also been to the observation deck or whatever it was called on top of one of the Twin Towers,

getting to the top using some fast elevators. So this was not some unknown buildings to me. I had even been on the top (or close to the top) of one of those two buildings, IIRC!

I don't exactly recall much of what I saw later that day. But I think I would have noted CNN calling it out as a terrorist attack not only on New York City but also Pentagon and elsewhere. And I am sure I would have noted the Twin Towers coming down, either live on TV or a little later.

The human suffering that happened that day (nearly 3000 died and slightly over 6000 were injured) did not come through immediately to me then. I mean, of course I would have realized that lots of people would have died and I am sure I would have been very sorry about that. But that sorrow was overwhelmed by the astounding and terrifying spectacle of the planes going into the Twin Towers, huge smoke coming out of the Twin Towers, and the Twin Towers later coming down with huge amount of debris being ejected with great force. Apocalyptic images! Utterly unbelievable! IIRC, I was in shock.

Later as I tried to come to terms with what had happened, IIRC, I wondered how USA, with the most powerful military force the world had ever seen, would react to this terrorist attack! Was there going to be a big war?

I felt very disturbed about what had happened and I feared how violently the USA would react.

I don't exactly recall this but I am sure I would have eventually turned to prayer to God and my Gurudev Sathya Sai Baba to help calm myself and also pray for USA and for peace in the

world. I was not into any public writing of any sort then. I was just a software consultant doing his job and doing some spiritual service and other spiritual endeavour. These things were way beyond me to seriously analyze and comment then. But I would read & view analysis and comments of others in mainstream Indian media (print & TV).

In later years, especially after Mahasamadhi of Sathya Sai Baba in April 2011, as I started coming out of my self-imposed Puttaparthi/Prasanthi Nilayam cocoon and tried to get a better understanding of what's happening in the wider world, I read up and viewed up on 9/11. I saw horrific videos showing the human suffering in the Twin Towers attack. That really shook me up. Mind you, I repeat that, IIRC, I was on one of the same Twin Towers buildings myself in the second half of the 1980s. If I had been visiting NYC on that day in 2001 perhaps I may have been on the top floor (or among the topmost floors) in the observation deck (or whatever it is called) of one of the two buildings, when the attack happened! So the human suffering part not only was very real to me as I viewed these videos (after 2011) but also something that could have happened to me!

Note that of the 2996 people who died in the 9/11 attacks, 41 were Indian,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_September_11_attacks.

Now that I am a social media writer, I think I should make a statement about my view on 9/11. I unequivocally condemn the horrible 9/11 (11th September 2001) attack on the USA. My heart goes out to the non-combatant victims of the heinous

terrorist attack. I think it was terribly cowardly on part of the terrorists to have attacked non-combatants in this horrible manner.

It is a great tribute to the spirit of USA and of New York City in particular that they overcame that horrific attack. A memorial to 9/11,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_September_11_Memorial_%26_Museum, and One World Trade Center, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_World_Trade_Center, have come up in the same location where the Twin Towers stood. The terrorists' destruction was replaced by new and great construction and life moves on.

In my readings and viewings (after 2011), I also noted that USA foreign policy changed significantly after 9/11.

--- end blog post extracts ---

Transcript of USA Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's remarks on USA-India relationship for next 100 years; My comments,

<http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2017/10/transcript-of-usa-secretary-of-state.html>, 20th Oct. 2017. I have given below the 'My comments' part (slightly edited) of above post:

Ravi: What a wonderful, logical and clearly articulated vision for India-USA relationship in the Indo-Pacific region for the next 100 years. I find this speech of Secy. Tillerson to be very inspiring! It also reflects good knowledge of history of India and South Asia. My heartiest congratulations to Secy. Tillerson and his team!

I think I completely agree with everything I have given above of Secy Tillerson's remarks (I only deleted one sentence about an extremist organization as I don't know much about that orgn., from the above speech, excluding Q&A, of Secy. Tillerson). I am surprised to find that I, an Indian living in India but who has had rather extensive exposure to USA and Western Europe in my former international software technologist career, am in such complete agreement with these quite long and exhaustive remarks of USA's Secretary of State about USA-India relations now and in the coming years and decades, perhaps for the next 100 years. I mean, I expected to have some polite disagreements with some points in his remarks. However, in the Q&A part, I do have some polite disagreement with Secy. Tillerson's views. As the Q&A part gets into some sensitive territory I have chosen not to include it, and not to comment on it.

As a person who now has a strong interest in spirituality and religion, I would like to say that freedom of religion (including freedom to have no religion), and having large portion of its population as believers in God, is another strong common feature which binds USA and India.

<http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/> states that Christians make up 70.6%, Other faiths make up 5.9%, No faith (Nones) - 22.8% and Don't know - 0.6%, of USA population. That makes believers in God being 76.5% of USA population.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_India states that according to 2011 census, Hindus are 79.8%, Muslims - 14.2%, Other faiths - 5.8% and Religion not stated (Nones

perhaps) - 0.2% of Indian population. That makes believers in God being (at least) 99.8% of Indian population.

I recall how I was amazed to read "In God We Trust" on USA dollar bills. Now India is, population percentage wise, a far more God believing country than USA. But Indian currency notes do not have the word, God, in it. Indian currency notes have the motto, Satyameva Jayate - Truth alone triumphs, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satyameva_Jayate, which is from the Upanishads (end of Veda; Vedanta), along with the national emblem, a modified symbol of an ancient and famous Indian king who promoted Buddhism (Lion Capital of Ashoka, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion_Capital_of_Ashoka). So there is morality and religious motif in it but not the word, God.

Then I noted that the USA Congress House of Representatives had an engraving of the words, "In God We Trust" in a prominent place above the House Speaker's chair, <http://freedomslighthouse.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/housechamberingodwetrust.jpg>.

Later I had more exposure to the role of Christian faith in building the USA. As a Hindu, I have never ever faced discrimination or hatred from any USA citizen or resident, on account of me being a Hindu (though I did not particularly exhibit my Hindu faith during my stay in the USA). Further, the USA has allowed Hindus to peacefully worship God according to Hindu religion and have allowed many Hindu temples to come up in the USA. I, and I am quite sure many

other Indian Hindus, found this tolerance of Hindu religion by USA to be a very attractive and vital feature of the USA.

I should also say here that I have great reverence and love for Lord Jesus Christ, and for the Christian faith in general. I have been very impressed by, and experienced great joy in learning about, many Christian churches (denominations), pastors, priests and their congregations and services (including gospel songs) in the USA.

I think this freedom of religion, so long as the practice of a religion is not a threat to the constitution and people of a country, and faith in God of the majority of its people [over three-quarters of USA population and almost all of Indian population], are core values and attributes of both USA and India constitution and peoples, which significantly contribute to making USA and India natural allies for this 21st century.

I should also mention here that both in USA and India, freedom of people to have no religion is respected by the constitution and by law. So legally, any person can choose to be an atheist or agnostic, both in USA and India. While such persons may find it somewhat difficult to assimilate in all aspects of Indian society, especially its many religious festivals (like Diwali which is going on now), and which has (at least) 99.8 % believers in God, as far as I know, there are no reported persecutions, in this early 21st century, of any person residing in India, Indian or non-Indian, for choosing to be an atheist or an agnostic.

Secy. Tillerson said in above speech, "In this period of uncertainty and somewhat angst, India needs a reliable partner

on the world stage. I want to make clear: with our shared values and vision for global stability, peace, and prosperity, the United States is that partner."

Ravi: As an Indian citizen (living in India), my view is that India is honoured by USA stating that it is a reliable partner of India on the world stage, and that India should wholeheartedly co-operate in this reliable partnership, so long as such partnership does not entail aggression from India against any country, big or small, that follows international norms and international law.

Secy. Tillerson said in above speech, "And the very international order that has benefited India's rise – and that of many others – is increasingly under strain."

Ravi: Helping to sustain and promote rules based international order that India has benefited enormously from in the past few decades, is, I think, India's duty and also to India's and many other countries' benefit.

In this context, I would like to mention my gratitude to USA government from the Bill Clinton presidency years (Democrat; Jan 1993 to Jan 2001) onwards, through George W. Bush presidency years (Republican; Jan 2001 to Jan 2009), Barrack Obama presidency years (Democrat; Jan 2009 to Jan 2017) and now Donald J. Trump presidency years (Republican; Jan 2017 onwards), for their role in South Asia in keeping the peace in India, and for protecting and defending the rules based International order. I mention these years as this is the period during which I have been doing some reading about USA govt. role in such matters. In particular, I think USA has been

instrumental in ensuring that India-Pakistan hostilities do not go beyond small battles and burst into a terrifying nuclear war that would be devastating for many Pakistanis as well as many Indians, with long-term damage to both countries.

It is the protection of the rules based international order that the above USA governments (followed to some extent by me from 1993 onwards) provided that played a vital role in India's economic growth, which included my own individual financial/economic growth during my Mumbai based independent international software technologist/consultant role (individual business; one man show) from around 1993 to Aug. 2002 (after which I retired from commercial work to pursue a simple and single (unmarried) spiritual aspirant life). I would like to express my gratitude to the above USA governments for this role they have played in facilitating India's economic rise in the world, and my own individual financial/economic growth (till Aug. 2002).

Secy. Tillerson said in above speech, "In particular, our starting point should continue to be greater engagement and cooperation with Indo-Pacific democracies. We are already capturing the benefits of our important trilateral engagement between the U.S., India, and Japan. As we look ahead, there is room to invite others, including Australia, to build on the shared objectives and initiatives.

India can also serve as a clear example of a diverse, dynamic, and pluralistic country to others – a flourishing democracy in the age of global terrorism. The sub-continent is the birthplace of four of the world's major religions, and India's diverse population includes more than 170 million Muslims – the

third-largest Muslim population in the world. Yet we do not encounter significant number of Indian Muslims among foreign fighters in the ranks of --name-snipped-- or other terrorist groups, which speaks to the strength of Indian society. The journey of a democracy is never easy, but the power of India's democratic example is one that I know will continue to strengthen and inspire others around the world."

Ravi: I think the observation of Secy. Tillerson about India being a diverse and dynamic country with Indian sub-continent being the birthplace of four of the world's major religions (I think he is referring to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism; Opening section of https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_India states the same), shows his knowledge about this vital religion aspect in India. Religion is very deeply entwined with the life of almost the whole of 1.3 billion Indians. It is my considered opinion that religion and faith in God are one of the most precious, if not the most precious, things/possessions/values of the vast majority of Indians, even if some of them may not be so articulate about it. For sure, religion and faith in God are the most precious things/values of my life.

Secy. Tillerson's remarks about Indian Muslims having largely shunned extremist terrorism show that he has a good grasp of this important aspect of contemporary India. I should mention here that one of the spiritual masters I revere and whose teachings I try hard to follow, is the Late Shirdi Sai Baba (gave up physical body in 1918 in Shirdi, Maharashtra), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sai_Baba_of_Shirdi, who used to wear the dress of a Muslim fakir and frequently say, "Allah Malik" meaning "Allah/God is the Lord/Master". He is also

well known for promoting Hindu-Muslim unity, and had both Hindu and Muslim followers. He would teach, "Sabka Malik Ek" meaning "The Lord/Master/God of all is One", which I, a devout Hindu, deeply believe in. That is, the God of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrians etc. is ONE, though the traditions and paths followed by these various religions and sects within them are different, but leading eventually to the same ONE God.

About the initial part of above quote of Secy. Tillerson, I fully support the idea of USA, India, Japan and Australia - the four major democracies in the Indo-Pacific - collaborating to ensure freedom of navigation and ensuring international law and rules based international order compliance in the Indo-Pacific region.

=====

Some additional thoughts from me on this matter:

I think there is BIPARTISAN support from USA administrations & USA Congress, from George W. Bush presidency onwards, towards closer ties with India based on shared interests and values. That is the vital part - shared interest and values.

...

In this matter, I think 9/11 tragedy and terror attack when George W. Bush was the USA president, was the turning point for USA, after which USA administrations and Congress, both Republican and Democrat led, have advocated and taken steps to have a much closer relationship with India than earlier. And

in India, both the UPA and NDA governments which have been in power since 9/11 have welcomed that closer relationship moves from the USA, again based on India's shared interests and values with the USA.

...

I think both USA and Indian administrations and Congress/Parliament follow policies based on their individual countries' interests. What I am saying is that, after 9/11, both Republican and Democrat led USA administrations and Congress as well as UPA and NDA Indian governments and Parliament, find that closer USA-India business and military ties help each other. That is, it is in both the countries' interests.

Now here I would also like to say that my view is that Russia is an old time-tested friend of India which has helped India in very significant ways for decades since India's independence. In the coming decades, India should always remember the help rendered by Russia to us in the past with some important collaborations continuing even today. India must balance its closer relationship with the USA in such a way that India's long time-tested relationship with Russia is sustained for the foreseeable future. I personally have nothing but goodwill towards Russia and its people as well as many relatively new countries (after Dec. 1991 dissolution of Soviet Union) and their peoples which were earlier part of the Soviet Union.

BTW to put things in real-life perspective for my life in Puttaparthi, an international pilgrim/spiritual aspirant town with many Russians and Americans living in it, in my

apartment building, my current next door neighbour on one side is an elderly Russian lady (seems to be out of town now) and, on the other side, is an elderly American lady! We live in harmony and peace!

--- end extracts of blog post ---

Why Puttaparthi and not Pittsburgh? (Why did I choose to focus on spiritual quest and spiritual ashram stuff in India instead of doing some great software development work in USA?),

<https://ravisier.blogspot.com/2019/04/why-puttaparthi-and-not-pittsburgh-why.html>, 21st Apr. 2019. Given below are relevant extracts from the blog post suitably modified to correspond to this version of the book.

I request the kind indulgence of readers for some comments that praise me. I felt that I need to be accurate and share it, in the interests of truth.

In a Facebook post in one of my former software company ex-employees group, I had shared the link of the a draft version of my autobiography part 1 book.

On that post, a former colleague from one of my former software companies wrote the following (slightly edited and excludes some unrelated part; he was OK with public sharing):

Had a quick glance at the book and also shared the same with my family members.

...

I need to go through the pages again on why you moved to spirituality.

You were technically very good and also very good communicator. You had excellent analytical skills. You were also part of evolving software industry. I admired you a lot.

For the talent you had, you could have been an architect / creator of new technology in Google or a similar organization. I am not talking about the monetary part but satisfaction of being part of a software research and innovation product. You were very well admired even at that young age. The certificates you had attached showed recognition in the industry.

...

Why Puttaparthi and not Pittsburgh is what I need to understand.

I responded (slightly edited):

Thanks for the kind words about my skills though you have been very effusive. I think I was strong in my technical areas but not as great as you make me out to be.

You have raised an interesting point: Why Puttaparthi and not Pittsburgh is what I need to understand.

Some parts of this book, that are relevant to answering this question, are given below:

Autobiography of an Indian Software Techie ... Page **292**

Towards the end of the chapter, "Software Development Career Starts Off", there is a reference to my spiritual interests even when I was in Datamatics. Here's that small reference, "I also did attend many spiritual meets to get a feel about them and also read rather deeply on scripture especially Vedanta. However I did not have Bhakti (faith in God and love for God) - I was looking at it only from a rational/intellectual point of view and missed out the emotional/Bhakti experience of God."

[BTW I recall that you had invited me to attend a spiritual function in Bombay (most probably sometime in second half of 1980s) and that we both had attended it. I recall that a very interesting speech was made by the main holy personage (a Swami) at that event. I think I can still recall his explaining BLISS and saying that it is not some capital B, L, I, S, S, implying that it is not some explosive 'fun' thing but more of an inner joy experience.]

In the initial part of the chapter, "Excitement of Joining a Start-Up In a Key Position" there are some pages covering how the BTC startup failure impacted my mental and physical health.

I have given some paragraphs from later pages in the same chapter, "Excitement of Joining a Start-Up In a Key Position", below (relating to BTC company) as they are very germane to this question:

[A view was put forward that running a company did not suit me.] My response: Well, I would say that I expected the top man to handle the marketing bit and my failure was in not properly assessing the top man's marketing skills and contacts for the software consultancy export business. I think I did a

reasonable job of my role of "Software Development Manager". I was not expected to play the marketing role. The top man who was expected to play the marketing role could not deliver orders.

So I tend to disagree with the view that running a company did not suit me. Many software and other entrepreneurs in the USA had failed in their initial enterprises, learned their lessons, and moved on to found/co-found and run successful companies. In my case, I am quite sure, I would have licked my stress wounds and healed them over some time, and then could have rejoined the software consultancy export management/business fray a wiser man and succeeded. In fact, quite a few companies in SEEPZ, including my first company, Datamatics, would have welcomed me with open arms. A lot of other businesses, including a flourishing financial firm started by a family friend, who wanted to move into software were keen on hiring me to start their software consultancy business effort!

But destiny had other things in store for me. I deeply analyzed my goals in life and felt deep inside that running a software company was not really my destiny/my calling. I turned my enthusiasm to exploring spirituality and my cultural roots, and looked upon my software development/engineering profession as just a means to support me but not as my main goal in life.

--- end paragraphs from chapter, "Excitement of Joining a Start-Up In a Key Position" ----

I think the above explains the reason why I chose to follow spiritual stuff with software development as only a means to

support me financially, rather than software development stuff as the main goal of my life.

Further the spiritual stuff that I was interested in, which were traditional Hindu devotional and Jnana marga (knowledge path) paths, eventually led me to an ashram in South India. That was just a natural outcome. Had my focus been mainly on software development successes, I think I may have been led to settle down somewhere in the USA, most probably in California as I had really liked Santa Barbara, California during my 2 month stint there in the early 1990s, and as California is one of the software hubs of USA.

Hope that is a decent answer to your question.

The former software colleague and friend thanked me for my detailed reply. He also mentioned that the Swami I mentioned would have been Swami Dayananda who he knew (about) from his school days in Cement Nagar, Kurnool Dist., AP.

I responded that yes, the name Swami Dayananda rings a bell and it must have been him (for whose event we both had gone in Bombay).

...

I asked him: Is it the same Swami Dayananda as is shown here: <http://www.dayananda.org/teachers-india.html>?

Here's a 1976 Gita lesson video of Swami Dayananda:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDTsDSFrBm4>

My friend responded that it is the same Dayananda.

--- end extracts (suitably modified) of blog post ---

Why am I not using professional editorial services for my part autobiography book?,

<https://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2019/04/why-am-i-not-using-professional.html>, 25th April 2019. Given below are contents (slightly edited) of this post:

This question popped up in a recent mail exchange I had.

I had toyed with the idea of using Pothi.com's editorial (and other) services, <https://pothi.com/author-services/>, for (this) part autobiography book. There is no doubt in my mind that if I do so, it will make the book much better and much more readable, as my writing style for this book, due to various reasons, has been a hasty one.

But I decided against it for the following reasons:

- 1) I will need to spend time interacting with the editorial services person as they suggest changes and corrections. I am reluctant to spend that time.
- 2) I have chosen the free/not-for-profit route for this book like in the case of my previous and first book (and perhaps for

some other books that I plan to self-publish using my contents of my blogs). So from an economic sense point of view, given my lower middle class Indian retired lifestyle, I felt it would be inappropriate for me to pay for such services.

Does that mean that my part autobiography book will be condemned to remain as a hastily written book without the polish and good readability that a good book should ideally have? My answer here is: Not necessarily. I have made a clear permission statement in the book allowing anybody to improve the book and profit from it (without me getting any money). I see myself as providing the raw data in a sense, and which raw data is still readable for those who are deeply interested in the topic and so are willing to overlook some hasty/non-professional writing issues that the book surely has. Perhaps it is something like a diary which is being shared publicly.

One of the key audience segments that I have written this book for, is young spiritual aspirants who wonder how one can lead a life where one has to pursue a career for a livelihood for oneself and one's parents, and still pursue spirituality with intensity. Such persons may gain from knowing my life story in this regard. And I presume that such readers (a small minority) will be deeply interested in the topic and will not mind the hasty writing and lack of polish in the book.

But, I have to say, I expect that quite a few software techie folks who may not be that interested in spirituality, would get put off by the hasty writing and lack of polish in my book, as they would be used to professional quality writing, in most, if

not all, of the books they read. This will include some, but not all, of my former software industry colleagues, and some of the students that I taught or interacted with in the Sathya Sai university, Puttaparthi (Prasanthi Nilayam) campus, during my stint there from Jan. 2003 to March 2012.

Hopefully somebody else may step in to polish up my book and then sell it, profiting from that work.

And there is an outside possibility that after I get some of my other blog contents self-published as 'hastily written and not polished' books, and am free, I myself may revisit these books and polish them, perhaps using services of professional editors and perhaps attempting to recover those expenses by selling the book at suitable price (and not as free ebook and at minimum price for paperback).

--- end blog post contents ---

Appendix 2: List of autobiographical content posts of my blogs

Given below are my blog posts (list posts) having list of autobiographical content posts (not limited to up to age 40), some of which posts have been reproduced above in part (extracts) or full. Note that these lists were last updated in July 2016 and so may be missing out some later blog posts with autobiographical content in them. The posts mentioned in these list posts may be of interest to some readers as some of them have additional autobiographical content beyond what is covered in this book, but in bits and pieces usually embedded in other general content.

1) List of posts of this Spiritual blog with autobiographical content, <http://ravisiyer.blogspot.com/2016/07/list-of-posts-of-this-blog-with.html>, last updated on 18th July 2016

2) List of posts of this Misc blog with autobiographical content, <http://ravisiyermisc.blogspot.com/2016/07/list-of-posts-of-this-misc-blog-with.html>, 13th July 2016

3) List of posts of this Indian CS & IT Academic Reform Activism blog with autobiographical content, <http://eklavyasai.blogspot.com/2016/07/list-of-posts-of-this-indian-cs-it.html>, 14th July 2016. Note that this blog typically has quite technical software development related content which may be of interest to software techies but may not interest others.